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Anthology of Covid-19 Chronicles

Top 15 Stories from the

2020 REEL

**Young Writers
Challenge**

Edited by
IBRAHIM BABÁTÚNDÉ IBRAHIM



COVID-19 CHRONICLES ANTHOLOGY

REEL Foundation

Edited by Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

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About Reel Foundation

Foreword

As a teenager growing up in Nigeria in the 1990s, a lot of the books I read did not always reflect my everyday existence. With our school literature still influenced by the colonial curriculum, I had more British authors like Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare on my bookshelf than authors closer to home like Chinua Achebe. Even the stories from other African authors and poets I read like Ayi Kwei Armah and J P Clark orbited matters that didn't always directly involve teenage me—political uprisings, clashes of culture, analytical examinations of what it means to be African. The few stories I did read that centered teenagers (like Chuwkuemeka Ike's *The Bottled Leopard* or the *Eze Goes to School* series) were mostly boarding-school stories which, for day-student me, still felt like a world distant from my own.

I wanted to read stories written for me, about me and others like me.

This is an inquiry that has followed me into adulthood, which is why when I first read the stories featured in *COVID-19 Chronicles*, I felt a flame re-ignited. It warms my soul that Nigerian teenagers can now look to literature that is of them, for them, and by them. That this is happening on the back of the most impactful global pandemic in recent history makes it a double blessing (an irony, considering that the deadly virus itself has claimed countless lives). But make no mistake about the importance of this collection: It offers documentary evidence from an underrepresented group within the Nigerian populace; and does so at a pivotal time in global history.

In going through these pages, one will be bedazzled by the brilliance of these fledgling yet inquisitive writers. The young mind's apprehension over continuing to deal with everyday anxieties (looming examinations, making and keeping friends) amidst unprecedented changes in their lives due to the pandemic (pivoting to virtual learning, new hygiene guidances, lockdowns and ever-changing mobility policies) is well demonstrated.

The focus of the media and literature on the impact of COVID-19 on broader issues has had the effect of the voices of teenagers caught in the middle being largely ignored. *COVID-19 Chronicles* is one step toward righting that discrepancy. REEL Foundation and its founder, Olatunde Ajoke Adeola, have made a historically important move here. Editor Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim and Artmosterrific have, in selecting these stories, created an archive that will, now and in years to come, ignite hope in others as these stories have in me.

Suyi Davies Okungbowa

[Award-winning Nigerian author]

Tucson, Arizona

January, 2021

Introduction

The REEL Young Writers Challenge was essentially, a story writing competition for children, to ignite imagination and creativity, as well as reward diligence and excellence.

Imagination and Creativity are crucial to children's learning and development. The ability of a child to spin these skills into written stories is phenomenal and should be encouraged and developed. In the words of the revered Albert Einstein – "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

It is against this backdrop that REEL Foundation launched The REEL Young Writers Challenge for children aged 7-13 years across Nigeria, with the goal to ignite imagination, ingenuity, promote and reward diligence in children.

Also, taking into consideration the learning gaps that had been created due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this challenge was designed to provide an avenue for children to be resourcefully engaged and excited outside the physical school environment.

More than 300 entries were received from over 20 states and we were enamoured by the depth of reasoning, imagination and varying perspectives captured by the young writers. Our team of judges had a hard time selecting their top 15 stories across the two age categories, but alas! as in all competitions, the winners must emerge.

The 15 stories in this anthology represent the brilliance and creativity of young minds in Nigeria and will keep you entertained until the last dot. We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we have.

Our deepest gratitude goes to our sole sponsors, Total Nig. E&P Multipurpose Cooperative Society for their financial support towards the implementation of the entire project. We are also immensely grateful to everyone who contributed their time, energy and resources towards its overall success.

Special shout out to our judges, Funmi Ilori, Rebecca Ebenezer-Abiola, and Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim who also doubled as the anthology editor; as well as Artmosterrific, our beloved publishers who saw the vision and

made it possible for us to properly document these beautiful stories.

For now, and for all times.

Happy Reading!

Olatunde Ajoke Adeola

Founder/Programmes Director, REEL Foundation

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10 - 13 CATEGORY

What Covid-19 Did To Us

Anuoluwapo Adriane Aina

Going to bed at 11 pm and waking up at 10 am, wondering what day of the week it is; this is what COVID-19 did to us. Not being able to hang out and celebrate birthday parties with friends; this is what COVID-19 did to us. Being paranoid every time you have to step out of your house; this is what COVID-19 did to us.

The streets were clear of people, and sirens echoed through them. Shops were closed, and their doors were dusty. Different designs and colours of face-masks hugged people's faces. Shopping malls were mostly empty; their car-parks silent.

"COVID-19," I said with a sigh.

I didn't even know what to think about anymore. It all happened so suddenly. One minute, I was shooting hoops in school and hanging out with friends. A day after, I was stuck doing online school and constantly wearing this uncomfortable thing called a 'face-mask.' I thought about this as I took a bath.

After getting ready for school, I put on my headphones and took a deep breath, then I joined the Zoom call.

"Mackenzie, there's another way!" "Please just pass the ball..." I heard echoes in the call from someone's television. I heard an eerie sound and saw that a classmate's mic was not muted.

"David, turn off your mic for Christ sake!" I said in anger.

Finally, the teacher, Ms Rosa joined. "Good morning class. Today we're going to be learning earth sy—" she said as her voice cut off from the call.

"I think she got disconnected from the call again," said Chika in her meek voice.

"You think?" I said sarcastically. I knew I should be more polite, but I was not in the mood and my classmates were not making it any better.

After a few minutes, the teacher rejoined. Now her voice was breaking off as she spoke: "We-will-be-learning-about-earth-systems."

I rubbed my hand on my head in annoyance. I managed to get through the class and went for my short break. I

took an apple and came to sit back down on my seat.

The rest of the day, I managed to make it through my classes. At the end of it all, I went on my bike and rode around in the park. I needed some fresh air after my hectic classes.

The rest of the school year, I did online classes. I had good days and not-so-good days. The only things left were graduation and exams.

The day exams began, I sat on my sturdy chair and put on my headphones. As usual, there was a lot of background noise.

“Good morning class,” Ms Rosa said. “Today, we’re going to be writing our science and social studies exams.” Thankfully her Wi-Fi connection was better today and there was no cracking or lagging.

“Make sure to take your time on the test and give it your all,” she carried on saying. “The forms will be sent to you. You have limited time to finish before it locks you out. Good luck!”

We all left the call and got to work. I opened google classroom with laser speed and dived into the forms. I cracked my knuckles, wrote the exam with ease, and submitted right on time. Many of my friends found it difficult and some were not prepared. Very few people consistently showed up for classes. Some would not come for two weeks, and, on a random day, show up in class. It was especially stressful for the teachers because they would have to reteach what they already taught two weeks ago. It was annoying for the rest of us because we had to continually look for the missing students; call them to ask what was going on.

I managed to make it through my exams and had an excellent score. I was proud of myself for being resilient and not giving up despite how tough it was to learn during this time.

Then came the final day: Graduation! It was not how I thought I would be graduating, but I was happy and proud.

Having put on my gown and hat with the golden tassel, and wore my black heels, I sat down on a brown chair and joined the meeting. Parents, friends, and classmates were all there. Class by class, students were recognized, and guest speakers gave inspiring speeches at intervals.

Finally, all focus was on my class. My classmates’ pictures were displayed on the screen in turns, so I sat down until it was my turn.

“Congratulations, Adriane Aina. Now parents, please pass the certificate to your graduate,” said the principal cheerfully.

My dad, not too far from me, passed my certificate. I held it up high to the camera and pictures were taken. All my friends went through the same process. It felt so good to graduate, all the work and effort I had put in were well worth it.

That day at home, we all gathered for pizza on the carpet and watched Netflix. Quarantine and COVID-19 had taught me that family is the best; no matter what, they’re always there to support you.

Even though that summer holiday and physical graduation were taken away, my family was still there, and I know I can always count on them. COVID-19 has not vanished, and nobody knows when it’ll disappear, but we will stay strong through it.

The Missing Ingredient

Chideraa Duru

Intense fear gripped me as I saw people gathered in groups, all wearing sad looks and snapping their fingers in rejection. Peeping through my little window to the far-right side of the street, two headlights were blinking furiously. In trying to take a closer look, I felt intense pain as I forced my head through the burglary-proof. My pains though were far less, compared to the curiosity and anxiety that enveloped me, making me desperate to see and know what was going on across the street.

Just when I was about to pull my head back when I got tired, I sighted two men clad in white and what looked like waterproof jumpsuits. Their faces were masked completely. A thought suddenly ran through my mind – Ebola! The last time I saw that costume was during the dreaded Ebola crisis in Africa a few years ago.

“These men on whites again,” I muttered.

Still, on the lookout, I realized that this scene was beyond me. I pulled back my head and ran towards the sitting room to alert my parents. It was then that I realized that Mr and Mrs James – my best friend’s parents – tested positive for the dreaded COVID-19 and the NCDC was there on a mission to wheel both of them to the isolation centre.

I tried to hold back my tears, but I couldn’t. They streamed freely down my cheeks. I loved Oby and her parents so much. She and I were childhood friends. I used to visit their house almost every day until my parents suddenly restricted me because of COVID-19 social distancing and stay-home rules.

My friend and her younger brother were to be quarantined in their home for three weeks, under the care of their nanny. During these weeks, we were communicating with them on the phone and trying to calm them down with soothing words, assuring them that their parents would be fine.

Three weeks passed and there was no sign of Oby’s parents. I was worried and scared to the bones each time it flashed across my mind that they could die. I imagined Oby and her brother becoming orphans, but I quickly snapped out of it and ran to my mum’s room to allay my fears. My mum smiled, wrapped her hands around my shoulder and assured me that COVID-19 was not a death sentence.

One major, interesting routine that made me miss Mrs James so much was her cooking skills. Be rest assured to lick fingers each time she prepared her delicacies. We always gathered around her, watching, especially when she made her finger-licking sandwiches. Each time I went to their house, she called Oby and me to help her cook and learn in the process. We enjoyed these sessions so much because she cracked jokes and caused us to laugh so hard.

A week later, the test results of Oby, her brother, and their nanny came out negative for the third time. We were jubilating over the news when all of a sudden, another good news came. Oby's dad was the one that made the call. He requested that his wife wished to speak with me. I quickly grabbed the phone and she told me that she had a task for Oby and me.

My heart skipped!

We were to make sandwiches to welcome them back in two days! She listed the ingredients for me over the phone, but I realized that I didn't jot down the last one. When I was about to ask her to please repeat it, the call got disconnected. All efforts to call back proved abortive.

We later got the ingredients ready, but one was missing – the last ingredient that I couldn't jot down.

The much-awaited day came. Within a few hours, Oby's parents were back!

While Oby and her brother got stuck on their arms like super glue, I was happy, excited, and worried at the same time. We made the sandwiches, but what exactly was the ingredient I missed when Mrs James listed them on the phone? I became nervous on sighting her.

“Deraa!” I heard her scream as soon as I tried to sneak into the balcony. She was waving with smiles. My name was Chideraa, but she always called me ‘Deraa.’

I felt like a guilty dog that accidentally ate its master's egg. I walked towards her slowly, blushing all over as I entered her hug. She bent down towards my ear, trying to whisper something. Fear gripped me; the pounding of my heartbeat could be heard miles away. I wanted to confess my guilt before she entered the kitchen.

“I didn't get the last ingredient you mentioned ma...but...but...” I stammered, unable to keep myself from scratching my hair uneasily. “We made the sandwiches without it...”

“Oh! My baby. You and your friends were actually my heroes,” she said, smiling as she advanced towards the kitchen. She was shocked at the sight of the yummy-looking sandwiches on the kitchen table.

“You actually added the last ingredient....” She said with smiles, grabbing my hands and those of her two children. “The last ingredient I requested for was love.”

Love was the last ingredient?

“While we were away,” she continued, “you showed love and care to my children. You are the best friend they could ever have wished for in these trying times.”

Before she could finish, I had already burst out in loud laughter, asking amidst the chaos, “how could love be an ingredient?”

Equally puzzled, Oby and her brother joined me in asking.

I laughed so hard that I fell on top of one of the sandwiches that the nanny was eating, sitting in her kitchen chair. She too joined in the laughter and the rest of the story was like a dream come true.

We did it! We spread the love!

Wash your hands! Stay home and stay safe!

Sophy's Tears

Gabriella Adie

I have always known my aunt Sophy to be very lively and fun-loving. She is my mother's sister and she is newly married. She worked as an insurer in a popular insurance company. She was happy with her job.

Rumours of the Coronavirus pandemic started filtering into our ears towards the end of 2019, and by March 2020, the world was in a state of panic, not only due to the number of people that were dying every day but also because of the rate at which economies were shutting down.

At this time, my aunt was pregnant, and my sisters and I were very excited. We would be at home with mum and dad, and the best part was that we would get to visit aunty Sophy every day if we wanted to since she lived close to our house. We didn't get to write our second term examination, but it didn't matter, at least not at the moment.

It was fun until three weeks into national lockdown. Dad was not going to the office and mum had stopped her business. We had to adjust to the new financial realities that were staring us in our faces.

Aunty Sophy was almost due for delivery when she started having complications. She rushed herself to Asokoro General Hospital so she could see a doctor, but on arrival, she was sent back with a warning that the hospital had been converted to a quarantine centre and no healthy person was allowed into the premises.

It was a rainy afternoon. We were all in one room watching a movie on my mum's laptop when we heard a knock on the door. I opened, and it was my Aunty Sophy. She looked weak, tired and unhappy. I let her into the room and overheard her explaining her experience at the hospital to my mum. I felt pity for her.

The next two weeks were very challenging. My aunt went into labour and could hardly find a government hospital to take her in. Mum was unhappy because she really loves aunty Sophy. I and my sisters were no longer happy with the holiday. It was not in the interest of anyone; my aunty was at the verge of losing her baby and I could not do anything about it. I prayed silently for my aunt and her baby.

In the end, Aunty Sophy delivered a baby girl in a private hospital in the neighbourhood. She almost lost the baby due to blood infection that it had contracted from moving from one place to another while in labour.

My aunty had a hard time. She spent close to a week in the hospital with her baby. My grandmother had to come and stay with her for two weeks to help nurse the baby.

Aunt Sophy's husband is a gentle and soft-speaking man. He loves to play with us. My mum calls him Mike, but his name is Michael. He was very sad to see the needles that went in and out of his little baby, but he could not stop them since the baby needed the medication.

Aunty Sophy was discharged after one week and we were all happy to have her back home. She and her husband had to pay a large sum of money for the baby's delivery and subsequent treatment. Seeing the baby at home, however, brought us extra joy.

We were excited. Grandma was around, and we could spend the whole day with her if we wanted. Two weeks later, grandma returned to her base and we helped Aunty Sophy the best we could.

The baby's naming ceremony had come and passed; its church dedication too. Aunty Sophy was set to resume work as offices were almost fully opened. The Coronavirus which started in Wuhan city, China, had begun to slow down. Countries were succeeding in containing its spread. The World Health Organization emphasized the use of hand sanitizers and face-masks to reduce the spread.

The Nigerian people were suffering from terrible hunger, not just because of the disease, but also because the population largely depended on personal income that they got either from trading, rendering services, doing odd jobs or the likes.

Aunty Sophy's first day of resumption was not so pleasant. She walked into the office, only to meet cold faces. They gave her a very cold welcome and, immediately, she sensed that something was wrong.

Some colleagues hinted her that there was a mass layoff, but that she was not affected. After working hours,

she left for her house, feeling heavy and unsure of what awaited her. The next day was the day she would never forget. As she sat on her desk and opened her computer, she saw it – a mail from the head office. She had been sacked!

Yes, my aunt lost her job. She was jobless with a new home and an infant to take care of. She could hardly hold back her tears. She left the office and cried all the way home. It was not easy to console her, but we've been trying. Mom cannot do much because she is also only managing to get by, but she's doing her best to comfort my aunt.

The Coronavirus has changed everything and everyone. Families have lost loved ones; people have lost their sources of livelihood; some can no longer pay their rent; the world is in a mess; economies are struggling to find their feet; schools are yet to re-open, and we have obviously lost an academic year.

We are still here, waiting for things to return to normal. We are grateful to God for sparing our lives; at least there is the hope of recovering all that has been lost. I have learnt to do the things that I need to do to stay healthy; things like washing my hands, using hand sanitizers, using nose-mask, and maintaining social distancing.

The world has been brought under a mirror and we have discovered that health systems are not as fortified as they seem. Countries are taking measures to strengthen their health systems, and the rich no longer run to European countries for medical attention. I hope that third world countries would learn to build their economics and empower their citizens rather than spend on luxury abroad.

Isolated

Kelechi Onuobia

Friday. Or what was it? The joy, the relief from school, the euphoria Fridays would arrive with; they'd been eclipsed by the dark shadow that is the pandemic. Not even the nearby stereotypical voice of optimism which belonged to Dayo's overprotective mother – “think of the positive side” – could make a difference. Her anxiety over his father's constant goings-and-comings on business had started to introduce wrinkles.

She now conversed with Diana over the phone, accompanied by the noisy streets of Lagos, almost impervious to the circumstances, discussing details of today's Zoom graduation ceremony, much to Dayo's irritation. *Haven't they overtaxed her enough already?* This particular thought hadn't included his signature flippancy and was punctuated by a loud, sad sigh.

Many a night, his mother would console his sister during her searing release of emotion, and even her father, when work wasn't holding him captive. *Work seems to hold Diana captive too.* He'd never seen other seniors break down into tears that exuded the same immense pain. Yet, every night that followed, she'd devour her next textbook before the sun returned to the sky.

Imagine the pressure, he thought. Dismissively, he shook off the queer feeling and continued what was rapidly proving to be his “greatest masterpiece yet.” The next hour felt like mere minutes, like a visit to Disneyland, one spent far too quickly, no matter how many times one experienced the twists and turns of the same ride. With the happier, jubilant air painting always gave him, glancing at his plaque from last year on the table – “1st in Subject: Art and Design” – Dayo realised the “positive side” of the pandemic, the one that actually mattered to him – it gave him the time to relax, and do what he really loved.

“Dayo!” It was noon – ceremony time – and Diana's tone hovered between annoyance and worry as always. Hurriedly, taking his sketching pencil behind his ear out, as his mother would unavoidably ask of him – apparently, it was bad for the ears – Dayo joined them, sitting upright on the couch between her Acer laptop and an array of balloons, an arrangement that must have taken her ages to be satisfied with.

The ceremony banner was screen-shared and Diana's three-paragraph introduction as the MC flowed without a stutter from memory. “Good morning, Principal, Vice Principal, students, teachers, parents, guests and Year 11 leavers. Welcome to our End-of-Year Prize Giving Ceremony.”

–

A knock during the Year 10 awards was a welcome excuse to escape, for Dayo knew the delivery was from his favourite pastry shop.

“Remember to wash your hands!” Diana called after him.

Passing by the table, he noticed some sheets of paper and read the front. *Our Tears Will Hold the Shattered Glass*, by Diana Williams. Instinct told him it was only some lengthy homework, but it seemed closer to a whole novel. *Is Diana writing a book?*

Confused, he opened the door, but his disbelief at the person holding the bags before him made him forget everything else.

Speechless, he ran to hug his father. “You’re finally back! I didn’t know you were coming!” Dayo started, hardly letting his father get a word in.

“Your mom and I thought we’d surprise you today! But...” Dayo looked up at him. His father was no longer smiling. “Tomorrow, um... your mom and I need to talk with you. About... about Diana’s health.”

Dayo looked at Diana in the living room, introducing something else on the agenda. In his off-hand way, he remarked, “She isn’t injured though.”

His father frowned, eyes on the ceiling, as though he’d become uncomfortable in his suit. “No, Dayo ... I mean her... *emotional* well-being.”

The man left him abruptly, unable to bear the moment of realisation enveloping his son.

Dayo felt like he’d overheard his father and his friends discussing politics – as he’d just heard something he shouldn’t have. He looked at Diana, hugging her father as years had passed.

Feeling his heartbreaking slightly, he took advantage of one of the chairs around the table. Being honest with himself, he couldn’t remember the last time she’d smiled – *that* smile, not the facade he thought might shatter then and there into her sharp dissolve every night.

No – I just thought all seniors were stressed! In reality, his older sister’s isolation went far further from staying at home.

He’d only ever heard conversations around mental health in hushed tones. *Maybe she was ashamed.*

As the final awards were called, he thought about his mindset when painting, how it had changed life under the pandemic. *I have the time to relax and do what I really love.* He loved art – but what was that thing that gave Diana life?

The voices in the Zoom meeting behind him began to echo. “2nd position, a very tight race between them and first place – Samuel Adebayo!”

I have art, the best feeling in the world.

“And our Valedictorian...”

My sister needs that kind of love.

“Shortlisted for a trip to a prestigious Arvon writing course, ladies and gentlemen...”

I wish she knew that kind of feeling.

That feeling that makes everything worth it.

“Diana Williams!”

At that moment, time froze. The world was silent. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see but not hear his parents jumping up. The shock of it all almost knocking the computer to the ground. His sister, Diana Williams, jumping with them, tears in her eyes.

Tears that only *that feeling* could produce.

When sound existed again, when the Earth continued spinning on its axis, he found himself hugging her, an unfamiliar gesture. A soul-stirring gesture. “Congrats, D. You deserve it,” he said, the tears he knew would fall finally making their descent.

She hugged him back, the tears fully flowing from everyone. As the Williams family, living in their moment, left the Zoom meeting, the hundreds of people watching them celebrate from that Acer laptop, he’d finally put the pieces together – writing was his sister’s passion.

And this moment, surrounded by the people Dayo loved, it was nothing short of a work of art.

Quarantine Diaries

Makayla Roberts

I finally decided to open the app Madi talked me into getting two months ago. When I had typed in my username and signed in, I decided to put up my first post. It was a video of me doing a dance I made to my favourite song. I never expected what happened next.

My Room, After School, 2:30 pm

“You should download the app. It is made for you. You have the talent, and you might even blow up,” Madison said encouragingly.

“Fine, I will download Tiktok, but only because it sounds fun. Also, because I have this awesome new dance and I want to share it with anyone who follows me,” I said, giving in.

“Okay, but if you get famous, I am so saying I told you so,” Madison said, doing her goofy little happy dance as I hit download.

2 months later...

Wuhan, China

In a house of four, a mom and her three children were having a freshly cooked bat for dinner. At the time, it seemed like a normal dinner. They had no idea what was coming for them.

The next morning, the two younger sons, Wang Fang and Zhang Wei fell ill with a breathing problem. They were coughing and sneezing their brains out.

Very soon after, the sons were too weak to stand, and the local doctors said they had an average of three days to live. They didn't seem to know that this disease was highly contagious and deadly, so very soon it spread to the whole world and became a pandemic, causing a huge lockdown which leaves everyone in their houses with nothing to do.

So, therefore, boredom has struck, and all forms of socialization are cut off – apart from maybe calling people on video chat, but even this is not the same.

Thursday, 2nd August, My Living Room, 5:00 am

It was very hard for me to entertain myself because the only thing I find entertaining is dancing, and I couldn't do that anymore. This is because all the dance studios were closed.

So, since I was bored, I decided to call my BFF, Madi, to complain, but I guess it wasn't a good idea to call Madi at 5 am. She was really mad I woke her up, but since she couldn't go back to sleep, she decided to listen to my whining while she was cleared up her room. Madi is messy and I guess that is why we are at my house more.

Anyway, after I finished whining to Madi about my silly boredom problem, I decided finally to open the app she talked me into getting two months ago. When I finished signing in, I decided to put up my first post. It was a video of me doing a dance I made to my favourite song. The dance was pretty decent. I liked it, so I just posted and tagged it #foryoupage.

Thursday, 2nd August, Dunkin' Donuts Coffee Shop

I arrived at my favourite coffee shop and since I turned sixteen yesterday, I was finally old enough to try the cappuccino, so I did. As my older sister, Zoe's frappuccino was getting ready, a group of girls started mumbling. They were obviously observing social distancing, but I could hear one of them say, "O-M-G! Is that her?" in a

surprised tone.

I figured they probably weren't talking about me, so I let it slide.

Home, in My Room

When I got home, I decided to go check out my 'for you' page because I saw a very funny cat video and wanted to watch it again. I picked up my phone and clicked on the app, but as I opened it, something caught my eye. I had over a hundred notifications in my inbox, so I opened my notifications and found that over a million people followed me. I also had over ten missed calls from Madi.

I was so shocked, so I decided to make a video thanking my new one million followers.

After the video was posted, I had a feeling I was forgetting something, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Then I remembered when it was too late, I had online school. It was the one time my mum didn't remind me about something, and I was late.

It was around 2:30 pm and I had about thirty minutes left, so I joined the meeting, but that was the worst idea ever. I was having an English class and my teacher, Mrs Karen was being so dramatic. She kept on exaggerating the fact that I came in late throughout the rest of the class. Meanwhile, almost ten other people came in later than I did, and she kept calling only me out. Talk about annoying!

3rd August, Zoe's Room

I went into Zoe's room to annoy her because I was bored. And if you are wondering what happened to Tiktok, well, let's just say it gave my phone a glitch, so I had to delete it. Poof went my one million followers.

Anyways, I started to annoy my sister by taking her phone while she was texting with her boyfriend, Sam, but that didn't work out so well because she slapped me on the face and now I have a bruise underneath my right eye.

2 Months Later...

It has been like a year now and those so-called 'scientists' still haven't found a cure for this Coronavirus. Can't they just mix hand sanitizer and water and make a cure already?

22nd October, the Kitchen

Today, I planned to just stay in my bed and binge-watch my favourite Netflix series, *On My Block*, but that plan went downhill fast because as I was about to turn on the series, my mum burst into my room with a belt and yelled, "would you get downstairs and make yourself useful!"

Well, there went my plans for the summer. Anyways, I decided to make some French toast and freshly squeezed orange juice, but that idea crashed and burned too. The result was wet bread and a cup of tasteless hot cocoa because it turned out I don't know how to make French toast.

22nd October, the Couch, 4:15 pm

I was sitting on the couch, checking my messages and trying out Snapchat filters, when Zoe came in from the backyard, all dripping wet and hyper. She asked me, "do you want to come out to the pool and play Marco Polo with me?"

I, of course, was a champion at the game, so I said yes, and the game started.

But then, when it was my turn to look for Zoe, I couldn't see where I was going so then I hit my head on the

pool tile. It was very painful. It gave a serious migraine for two straight weeks.

This only comes to show that nothing ever happens the way you want it to. Well, that is my quarantine story. Hope you enjoyed reading it.

Miles Logan, The Serviceman

Modebola Oluwasona

Chapter 1: Endless Wait

In the army, you might think it is something interesting, every day going for missions and getting awarded medals. Sure, it happens, but how many times do you have a mission? Like seriously, even if there is an important mission, why would they ever pick the rookie?

All we did were drills. I mean, my dream was to become a serviceman – the highest fighter rank – but I can't get promoted if there aren't any missions.

Gotta bounce, it's light outs!

Chapter 2: A Change in Routines

“Mornin' troopers,” hailed Chris Gibson, our Base Area Commander. He received his promotion during the civil war, where you could get a different mission every day.

“You have a new routine of training,” continued Mr Gibson.

“Why?” asked an experienced voice.

“I just received a message saying there is a new alien insurgent group called Coronavirus. What we know is that they have a champion and once he is defeated, that's the end of the others. They all wear name tags and have a unique energy signature, so once we identify them, we can neutralize them. Their code names are Flu, SARS, and MERS. Others are Cold, Catarrh, and their champion, COVID. They may be a few, but they leave a path of germs around them that could make you become one of them if it comes in contact with your nose, mouth, or eyes.”

“So, we become just like them?” asked Brad Jeremiah, my best friend.

“Yes,” said the commander, showing signs of sadness. “So, we have to go on our missions wearing medical gear

like nurses, with the gown, the mask, and everything. I say that we attack the smaller ones first.”

“Permission to talk sir?” I asked.

“Permission denied!” the commander barked, followed by a burst of laughter. The laughter was like they didn’t even remember our dangerous mission tomorrow.

Chapter 3: The First Mission in Years

“Hello, soldiers. Today is your first mission in 789 days,” the commander said, followed by loud cheers from the highly motivated troops.

“That’s right, I was counting,” he continued. “So, these are your assignments. Intelligence Reporters check the radar. When you see the tiny blue energy signature, record the coordinates. DO NOT, I repeat, DO NOT mistake it for the violet one. It shouldn’t take you more than 20 minutes. So, by 6:20, I am coming to inspect your work. See you then.”

By 6:20, the commander came and took the coordinates. He instructed us to send the drones to take snapshots of the viruses’ hideout. “I give you 20 minutes to get pictures of their location. I say that if the COVID is nothing without the rest of the Coronaviruses, it will do all it can to protect them.”

I was going to list the fatal flaw in his plan, but he didn’t permit me to talk.

Well, let’s try our luck.

Chapter 4: A Failed Attack

Time for action.

We figured out their hideout, but it is highly confidential. I can only tell you if we win, to prevent any sabotage.

Well, we failed. The first mission in years, and guess what? We failed.

We lost a lot of men. Eight, to be precise, including Brad and the Base Area Commander, Chris. I mean, they are now part of them. They got infected.

Come on, I knew we should have gone for the big fish – COVID – before the small ones. I was injured in the mission and I won't be able to fight in the comeback.

Come on, I need to fight for my country. I need to become a serviceman level 3, and I am just a rookie-level 2. I need to step up about nine levels. It would have taken me 21 years if we had regular missions.

Chapter 5: What a Pleasant Surprise

Yo! Do you know when our Base Area Commander became part of the Coronaviruses? Guess what? They chose me to become the Base Area Commander. This was after my peers and I completed the course and won a series of competitions meant to uplift our spirits while training us at the same time. In the end, there was a raffle draw in which I was the lucky 101.

Wow! Now, I need only three more promotions.

Chapter 6: A Final Decisive Blow

This COVID thing is really ticking me off here. I mean, we all wear masks even during exercise, and I hate it.

So, here's the plan. I wear a thick film all over my body. On the night before the mission 'comeback,' I sneak out after lights out to buy a squirt gun, water gun, bubble gun, whatever you call it, as long as it shoots liquid; and maybe, pick up a few water bombs too. I fill the gun with disinfectants which destroy Coronaviruses, including COVID. I sneak out in the morning with the able-bodied soldiers.

While COVID is busy holding our soldiers, I sneak behind it and drop the bomb. And if I can, I run away with my one good leg, that will be great.

Well, that is what happened. The bomb cured me, Brad Jeremiah, but at the ultimate price paid by my comrade, Miles. He eventually got the posthumous honour of a serviceman level 3. He died a Base Area Commander and was buried a serviceman with a statue to his name.

Dreams Come True

Ola Inioluwa

A pandemic is a global outbreak of a particular disease which affects a lot of people. The global pandemic ravaging the entire world right now, affecting a lot of people especially school children, is the COVID-19 pandemic. So was the fate of this character in my story. It all began in late March 2020.

There was once a girl named Temi. She loved to assemble things. She attended a public school in Lagos. She was the only child of her parents, and though the parents were poor, they were happy and satisfied with what they had.

Temi had a dream to become an engineer. Due to the pandemic, however, schools were closed, so she had to stay at home. Her mother was a petty trader while her father was a carpenter. Sometimes, she went with her mother to her shop and sometimes she stayed at home. Temi was a good girl; she was obedient, responsible, and hardworking.

One day, while at home all alone, Temi helped one of her neighbours to fix his generator. The man was happy and gave her some money to thank her for what she did for him. She took the money and gave her mum to keep for her. Her mum was happy with her behaviour and told Temi to keep it up, also to not forget her dreams to become an engineer. Temi listened to her mum and always reminded herself that anything she set her mind on, she could accomplish.

Temi continued everything she always did, and soon enough, people began to know about her skills. They started calling her to help them fix minor problems in their houses. Temi always fixed

the problems properly and would receive gifts, encouragement, and money. They used all these to thank her for what she did.

She continued in this footsteps and her parents were supportive too. They were ready to assist her in her dreams. They believed in their daughter.

Many weeks later on one fateful day, while Temi was running errands for her mum, some hoodlums grabbed her and took her to an uncompleted building. There they took turns at raping the poor girl. Afterwards, they left her there and ran away. Temi could not get up as she was badly hurt.

After some time, her mother began to wonder where her daughter had gone to. She decided to go and look for her. She asked around if anybody had seen Temi. Nobody had seen her.

After some hours of fruitless search, her mother became tired and began to worry. She then saw a figure lying down in a corner inside an uncompleted building. She went closer and saw it was her dear daughter lying there, with her cloth torn and with blood all over her. She didn't need to be told what had happened. Her dear daughter had been raped.

Temi's mother gathered courage and helped her daughter to get home. After Temi had then finished cleaning herself up, she explained her ordeal with the hoodlums to her mother and father; how she had been grabbed and raped.

Her voice shook and there were tears in her eyes as she said this. Her parents too were in tears. Right there and then, Temi summoned courage and decided not to let what had happened to affect her life. She decided to make something good out of her life. She started studying more and more rather than dwell on one single event in her past. She became better in everything she did, from fixing little appliances to handling more advanced ones.

One day, while an ambassador was passing through the neighbourhood, his car broke down. There was no mechanic in sight when he asked for help. The people called Temi to help him fix his car. He was surprised when the person they called came out and it was a young girl. He kept his cool while Temi worked on the car. Soon, she found the problem, fixed it, and the car started working again.

The man was dumbfounded at how a young girl could handle something that big. He saw a girl with great potentials and talent. He decided to see her parents and begged them to allow Temi to study engineering abroad. Temi would be taken abroad and she would no doubt do excellently well there.

Temi never dwelt on the past. She decided to move on with her life. The rape incident was just a stumbling block, not a final stop. If she hadn't moved on, maybe she wouldn't have gotten the opportunity she did

This pandemic caused a lot of people to be confined in a place, resulting in too many atrocities like sexual abuse, violence, etc. I learned from Temi's story that one can rise above every hurdle in life and still achieve their dreams. I want all victims of rape to be courageous and still believe in their abilities to rise stronger than before, because their future is bright, and dreams still come true.

My Good and Bad COVID-19 Experiences

Onu Oghenejuvie Davina

The Emergency Assembly

My holiday started while I was in school. My classmates and I were doing our usual night-study prep and nothing special was happening, until our Head of Boarding came to our class and told us to pack up our books and follow him. We were all nervous at first, wondering: “Are we in trouble?” “Did we do something wrong?” But by the time we got outside, and we saw students from other classes moving along too, we went from being nervous to being confused.

Some of us thought maybe they were giving us an early leave for night prep, but then we saw the direction the Head of Boarding was headed: The assembly grounds.

Our proprietor was standing at the top of the steps, holding a megaphone. “I called this emergency assembly because the Coronavirus we’ve been talking about is spreading like wildfire in our country, and the Ministry of Education has instructed me to send you children back home. So, starting tomorrow, you all will begin leaving school.”

His announcement left us all shocked for a while.

“Okay everybody, move to your hostels and start packing your things immediately,” said the H.O.B.

We all went quietly back to our hostels to pack our things. Some of us went with their parents the next day, but those who’d need to travel on a bus or an aeroplane, like me, left the day after.

House Arrest!

When I got home I was really happy to be back. My family too was happy I was home. I imagined that once I got home, I’d relax and do whatever I wanted to do, but I was really disappointed to find out that I couldn’t do any of that, all because the government of Rivers State announced a total lockdown due to the increase of

Coronavirus cases in our state. Nobody was allowed to sell their goods, go to work, or even leave their immediate environment. I live in an estate and I couldn't leave the estate gate.

One day when my family and I wanted to go on a walk outside the estate, the security guards stopped us and said we couldn't leave without a government permit. That meant no cinema, no parks, and definitely, no friends would be coming to visit us.

The government, however, still allowed us to have a few market days so we could buy as much food and toiletries as we would need before the lockdown rules were reinstated. I thought it was beginning to look like a competition of who could buy the most provisions. I went shopping with my parents, but most of the items we needed were always out of stock, thanks to the rush and panic-buying.

My mum deals in food items, but restocking was difficult due to the ban on interstate travel, and this made available food items very expensive.

Learning Away from School

When the heavy part of the quarantine lockdown was eased, we were allowed to move around within the state, but we still couldn't travel outside our state of residence. If we needed to go out in public, it became mandatory to wear a nose and/or face mask. In some public places, they wouldn't serve you without a mask. We couldn't even go to some places at all, like the cinema, because the government shut them down completely.

The school proprietor sent a message to our parents that we would be starting online classes (or e-classes), using Google Classroom and Gmail. I had never used any of those before, so I was really excited to start.

“A man's mind stretched by new ideas may never remain the same.” A quote by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

When my dad helped me set up my Google Mail and Classroom accounts, I got to chat with my friends who had also set up theirs. The next day, I started the real classes. There were seven classes or periods per day. I copied notes at times. I had assignments to snap too. Sometimes we had Zoom meetings with our teachers to help us better understand subjects that seemed difficult.

After a while, the proprietor sent a message saying that our classes would be reduced to four or three times a day. I was happy because it would become a little less stressful and the daily sessions would finish faster.

My teachers used the scores from my assignments as my end-of-term result. My class experience was fun, but a bit stressful.

The Rest of My Holiday

When the classes were over for the long summer break, I was happy to finally get to relax as much as I could. My mum signed me up for a financial literacy class over Zoom, where we would learn about money. It was really fun, and I enjoyed it a lot. There were people from different countries and I made a few friends.

I also did a lot of family bonding while I was enjoying my summer break. Since we still had the quarantine lockdown, my parents stayed at home a lot and we did lots of fun things together. During my other holidays, we would go to a cinema or go out very often, so most of the time we didn't do as many things together or pay as much attention to each other. Now that we had a lot of time, we always watched home movies together and ate together so many times.

Like the popular saying goes: A family who eats, prays, sleeps, and does anything together, stays together.

I really appreciated the time I got to spend with my sister and parents because once the quarantine is over, I will immediately go back to my boarding school and I will see them less frequently. So, my holiday might not have had all the outings and friends that I would have liked, but it was fun, and it ended up being the best holiday ever.

The Monstrous, Mysterious Beast

Osose Onisomamovie Vidose-Eli

This attack, like a lion pouncing on its prey from its hiding place among the grass, is so sudden that it makes my head spin just thinking about how it began. No one was expecting this; no, not even the smartest person in the world. From a bunch of people laughing and chatting in the sun, we are now trapped at home, wondering when it would end.

On Friday, March 20, Trinity International College – the school I attend – closed due to the government’s orders to close all schools in the state. That is the attack of this beast, chasing us out of school, and giving me a 7 am flight back home to Port Harcourt. We were all laughing, chatting, and exchanging phone numbers, innocently unaware of how long this battle would last.

Five months later. Who would have thought? I was happy to be home in March, now I long to see my friends, hug them, and talk to them. But even though coincidence stretches forth its hand and I see them at the mall sometimes, I won’t be able to hug them and touch them as I did before the beast attacked. I can only wave and smile from a distance of 1.5 meters. It is so hard to restrain myself from hugging them, even though I know it is for the safety of everyone that the rule is in place.

This attack is like a break away from my friends and this has taught me that when life gets bitter, I should make the most of it. I am working on a talk-show. I go on bike rides occasionally. I’m improving my drawing skills, which makes me feel as if I am on summer break. I am also using this period to look at myself, note my strengths and weaknesses, and see what I can do to make myself better. This experience is teaching me how to trust my own opinions, be hopeful, patient, and prayerful.

I feel trapped and scared as more cases are announced and the deaths increase. The whole world is prey to this beast. Scientists are yet to find a weapon suitable to fight it, and this has led me to pray for them, the doctors, my family, my friends, and all the teachers who have taught me since I started going to school. I have drawn closer to Jesus and I am learning about the end times and the scriptures. I now understand them better, which is the highlight of the experience, ghastly as it seems.

From learning in school and talking with my friends face to face, the tables have turned to E-learning and texting friends and family. I am grateful the internet is not a human being. It would have stopped us from doing

anything at all.

I wish we didn't depend so much on the internet and gadgets like laptops, tablets, and phones. We use the internet for things as little as a chat with our friends, to things as big as a business meeting with people all over the world. Of course, the internet is good to reach out to people from different places and research on different topics that interest us, but too much of a good thing is bad.

E-learning hasn't been a thrilling experience for me. Network problems can make it difficult at times. For example, network problems can hinder someone from joining a class, making them miss all the teacher has said.

We may not notice now, but slowly and surely, the internet is controlling us, and we should learn to manage it better, not allow it to manage us instead. That is a skill I am learning as I use my phone and my laptop.

I do not go out often and the few times I go out, I have to wear a face-mask. This beast has enabled me to upgrade my personal hygiene level, and I'm now adding new habits I never indulged in before; such as wearing face-masks, staying at least 1.5 meters away from people around me, not touching my face without washing my hands, practicing good respiratory etiquette, and so on. Good hygiene, of course, is very important for us to hold out against any virus.

I cannot say that this experience is so bad because a relationship with Jesus is the best thing someone can ever have. However, this does not mean I will cease praying and hoping that this beast will not be here to stay, and that we will find a way of fighting a triumphant fight against the beast we call Coronavirus.

BEAUTIFUL

Ramalah Ibrahim Maigari

I have always hated staying put; being caged-in is one of my biggest fears. And now we're forced to stay in. I can't leave the house; I can't be with other people.

I love being surrounded by others because I don't like being alone. I don't like being alone because when I'm alone, I'm with myself, and I hate being with myself because I hate myself.

Mama always tells me I'm beautiful, but I know she only says that because I'm her daughter, and it is her duty to say things like that. Pa doesn't like me. He thinks I'm a curse; I'm a burden.

"Why was I born like this Mama?" I always ask her.

She would kiss my forehead and say, "you're beautiful my daughter. Love yourself."

But I didn't. I hated myself every day of my life, because when I look in the mirror, I see someone disgusting. I was born with a lazy eye. Mama told me it's called amblyopia. I have to always wear my glasses, and people always find it scary when I look at them. But when I speak, when I'm with people, I forget about my eye. I feel normal.

Now I'm locked up at home, keeping myself company. And I hate it.

One day during the pandemic, Pa comes home with a cough. Mama is always worried, and she thinks he has COVID-19, so she says we all have to go to the hospital to get medicine. I am of the opinion that if he does have COVID-19, we're not supposed to go to the hospital because others might get infected, but I say nothing, and so, to the hospital we go.

I'm glad I have a chance to at least get out of the house for a little while. Pa isn't rich; he's only managing. Even though my eye can be fixed, we don't have the money.

When we arrive at the hospital, I follow my parents as they try to get a doctor to talk to, but I'm told to wait in the reception. I sit down, happy because I can fix my attention on other people around me. They don't look at me; they don't seem to notice my eye. Maybe they're all worried about other things that are bothering them.

I wait for a couple of minutes. When my parents still didn't come out, I leave to try and find a toilet to ease myself. The hospital isn't big, but I couldn't find my way. I find a nurse and ask her where the toilet is, and she points me to the right direction. I finally get there, I go in and relieve myself.

As I'm washing my hand, a girl enters and almost crashes into me. I'm frustrated by her carelessness.

"Can't you see where you're going?" I snap at her.

It's only when the words escape my lips that I look at her carefully. She's not staring at me. Instead, she's looking at something behind me, holding a worn-out stick.

I gasp. She's *blind*. How could I have been so heartless? I can't imagine how hurt she must have felt at my words. I want to apologize but she speaks up first.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you. I didn't mean to." She says in a smallish voice. She looks about ten years old, meaning I have two years on her.

I feel horrible about it. It's not her fault she's blind. I should've been kinder. I can't imagine how she feels, but God knows that when people comment on my eye, it hurts me.

"I... I'm sorry. I-I didn't know you're..." I do not want to say 'blind' because it might hurt her more, so I trail off.

To my surprise, she giggles. "Blind? It's okay. You can say it. God wanted me this way."

I gulp. There's something clogging my throat. "Really? You don't hate that you can't see?" I don't know why I ask her this question, but I ask, even though it seems rather inappropriate for a conversation in a hospital bathroom.

The girl uses her stick to get to the sink. "I don't know. I wish I could see the colors of the rainbow or the rain, but I don't hate myself because I'm blind. I think it's *me*." With that, she enters a stall.

I *can* see the colors of the rainbow.

I can see the rain.

I hate myself because my eye won't stand still, and I have to wear glasses.

I start crying silently. I feel so ungrateful. This girl can't see anything, and she doesn't go around blaming herself for her ailment. She actually doesn't care; she loves herself the way she is.

Why can't I do the same? Why can't I love myself for me?

I wipe my tears and hurry out of the toilet before she comes out. Seeing her will only make me feel more guilt.

Mama scolds me for running off and Pa isn't with her.

"What's wrong with Pa?" I ask her. I feel my heart sink. Does he have COVID-19?

"He's fine. He's just paying for some medication. Everything is alright."

That night, when I'm tucked up in bed, ready to sleep, I start thinking.

Why is it so hard for me to accept me for *me*? I've always distracted myself with other people, but maybe I needed to be alone to actually think; to think about me.

"*You're beautiful.*" Mama's words echo in my mind. I'm beautiful. She has told me this all day, every day, but I never believed her. I never appreciated myself.

I'm beautiful. I am beautiful.

Maybe all I needed was to be alone to actually believe that I'm beautiful.

COVID-19 seems like a curse, but it has also blessed me with self-love.

I'm beautiful and I believe it!

7 - 9 CATEGORY

Food Wastage

David Khalid

I was very sad when Mum told me that I could no longer go to school. I was surprised at first, and angry again.

“Mummy, why can’t I go to school?”

“Because the government says you shouldn’t,” Mum replied.

I became angry at the government. Why would they just tell us to stop going to school, just like that? I loved school! School was fun for me because I got to play with my friends, Jubrin and Divine. We loved playing with the soft, sharp sand at our almost empty playground in our small school. But now, that was all gone.

The following Monday, I ran into the bathroom, took my bath, and dressed for school before Mum woke up. By the time she saw me, she busted into laughter.

“David, there’s no school until the lockdown is over.”

I wondered what a lockdown meant. I had never heard that word in all my seven years of being born to this beautiful world.

“Mummy, what’s a lockdown?”

“It’s a word used to signify a standstill.” Mum unbuttoned my shirt.

I was still confused. “Mummy, what I don’t understand is: Why are we on lockdown?”

“David, there is a fearful disease killing the whole world. That is why the government has asked you to stay at home.”

From then, I became more curious to know what the disease was all about. Was the disease bigger than malaria? I heard from one of our neighbors from the next flat – Mr. Usman. He said something about the disease killing people abroad. Some of our other neighbours said the disease was not in Nigeria. But after I saw my father listen to the news from our small TV one morning, I knew that the disease was serious, and it was in Nigeria. It was also the first time I heard the name of the disease: COVID-19.

We stopped going to the barbing salon; churches were shut; Mum stopped going to the market. She said the

market was closed as a result of COVID-19. We stayed at home for a long time and soon I forgot about school, and played with our neighbor's son, Philip. One afternoon, I went to Philip's house to call him out to play when I saw him sitting in front of the house, crying. I asked him why he was crying.

"I am hungry."

I told him to go and meet his mummy or daddy, so he could eat. But he shook his head and said, "there's no food. Yesterday, I took water for dinner. Now there's nothing to eat at home."

I ran home, and poured my lunch, the one mummy made for me and my sisters. I poured it into a black nylon bag, and I was about to run back to Philip's house when Mum caught me.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"I'm sorry mummy, but I wanted to give Philip my food. He is hungry." I told her everything.

Mum went over to Philip's house with me, and we met his parents. Although I couldn't understand why they had no food, but I understood that they had ran out of food and money because of the lockdown. Philip's father was an auto-mechanic and his mother sold vegetables at the market.

From then on, Mum always shared dinner with them. She would cook in large quantity and send over the rest to Philip's parents. But I also always shared my lunch and biscuits with Philip.

Meanwhile, before the lockdown, I never shared anything with anyone, not even my friends, but the lockdown has helped me to be grateful for the little I have. And even though the lockdown has stopped me from going to school, I am even more glad that I'm able to share my food with my neighbour.

How COVID-19 Has Impacted My Life and the Lessons Learnt from Staying at Home

Grace Oluwadarasimi Ogunrotimi

My name is Grace and I am 7 years old. I am from a family of 4; me, my dad, mum, and little brother, David. We live in a beautiful estate called NLNG RA, in Bonny Island, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Before COVID-19, life was so much fun on the Island. During weekdays, my mum would wake David and I at about 5 am to clean up and dress up for school. I always looked forward to wearing my crisp school uniform and stuffing my school bag with healthy foods. Once we had had our breakfast, we'd join the school bus. Sometimes instead of the school bus, mum/dad would drop us at school, just in time for the school assembly where we'd listen to the school announcement, sing the national anthem, pledge, and the school anthem, after which we'd go to our various classes.

In class, we'd learn the various subjects on our school timetable. Two of my favorite classes on my school timetable were Swimming, and Physical Education (PE). I love them because they make me physically fit and happy.

On weekends, I'd go swimming, watch movies, complete my assignment, visit the salon if necessary, attend church service, and sometimes birthdays, with the opportunity to see my friends on some occasions. It was definitely much more relaxing during the weekends. However, since COVID-19, everything changed.

Coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, is caused by a new strain of Coronavirus

(SARS-CoV-2) that has not been previously identified in humans. Discovered in Wuhan, China, it was first

reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2019. In Africa, Egypt and Algeria were the first countries to confirm cases of COVID-19.

The first COVID-19 case in Nigeria was recorded on February 27, 2020, by the Nigerian authorities. The affected individual, an Italian consultant, had entered Nigeria through Lagos, before traveling to the neighbouring Ogun state. When he developed flu-like symptoms, his host company contacted health officials who went from Lagos to Ogun state to bring him back to Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH). After this first case, there have been several more cases of COVID-19. In fact, as at the time of writing this essay, there are about 44,000 confirmed cases in Nigeria.

COVID-19 has impacted my life in many ways. One example: We had to take our third term session using various online platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, E-mails, and Edmodo. This was challenging at first, as we all had to learn to use the online platforms newly, but it was equally fun to learn the various functions of the platforms with the support of our parents and teachers. This period tested our resilience, and personally, it showed me that I can learn or do anything if I put my heart to it.

Interestingly, my brother, David, had his graduation from early years school online via YouTube. Also, due to movement restrictions, we have not been able to go to church since the pandemic started. We now attend virtual services via YouTube.

I miss riding on the see-saw and sliding down the slide at the RA Atlantic Park, with opportunity to make new friends and have fun with my David. However, we know this era will pass once we defeat COVID-19.

In the meantime, we all need to continue to abide by all safety guidelines and advices from the health authorities, such as: Washing of our hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and water; going out only if we have to; avoiding crowded spaces; using alcohol-based sanitizers; seeking immediate medical attention if we notice any symptoms of COVID-19; and finally, keeping oneself informed by listening to Nigerian and foreign news on

Channels TV, TVC News, France 24/ France 24 English, BBC News and more.

If someone should ask me what I have learned from this COVID-19 pandemic, I will say:

1. Prevention is better than cure; specifically, prevention of COVID-19 is better than the cure of COVID-19.
2. I can connect with friends and family through online platforms like Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc.
3. I have come to realize that being prayerful and hopeful is better than worrying unnecessarily about anything, including the pandemic.
4. It is good to be well-informed always. Stigmatization of any kind is wrong.
5. I have learned to be resilient, and to be thoughtful towards all kinds people, like the poor, orphans, misfortunate, lucky, rich and so much more.
6. To be thankful always for life and God's protection over my family, friends, and classmates.

I am super-excited for life after COVID-19, but for now, let's all just "stay home and stay safe."

Thank you.

Ashabi's Virtual Naming Ceremony

Monjolaoluwa Ayomide Ajiboye

We all woke up to the good news. My mum's sister, Aunt Kiki, had put to bed. She gave birth to a bouncing baby girl. This was exactly two weeks after the nationwide lockdown that was imposed due to the present Coronavirus pandemic affecting many countries of the world.

I learned this disease outbreak started in Wuhan, China. It is a respiratory disease affecting the lungs and it is rapidly spreading, killing and making many people fall sick all over the world.

To stop further spread of this virus called COVID-19, all schools, churches, mosque, and supermarkets in my country, Nigeria, have been closed down. There is presently no cure for this evil disease.

My siblings and I have been stuck at home for 5 months now. We have not stepped out of our compound in order to stay safe. Mum and Dad are also partially stuck at home. They only go out to run urgent errands; to buy foodstuff and other essentials for the house. To keep safe and prevent the spread of the virus in our home, they always wear their nose masks, and use hand sanitizers and gloves whenever they go out.

It was Mum who called to break the good news. She had left the house the previous afternoon to be with my aunt at the hospital. I noticed she packed some of her clothes and toiletries, along with her clinical nose-mask, hand sanitizers, and gloves, before hurrying out of the house after some brief talk with Dad.

The news got me so excited. I now have a new baby cousin. But I was also sad that I could not visit my aunt and her baby because it was not safe. Aunt Kiki is my mum's youngest sister and my favourite aunt, who had lived with us for some years before she got married. I like her very much because she is very kind and generous. She usually buys me and my siblings lots of gifts.

My aunt's husband, Uncle Tim, was stranded in Manchester, United Kingdom, because the Federal Government placed a ban on all international flights from other countries into Nigeria. Uncle Tim's company had sent him on some official duties two months ago, before the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. He was not happy that he was not with his wife when their daughter was born.

"If anyone ever told me I would not witness the birth of my daughter, I would have argued it. But thank God my wife and daughter are safe and well," he told Dad over the phone.

Aunt Kiki and her baby were immediately discharged to go home the next day as the hospital was not safe. Mum who had been at the hospital took them home. She had to be with Aunt Kiki to help with bathing and taking care of the baby as Grandma could not travel down from Ekiti due to the lockdown.

Uncle Tim informed us that the naming ceremony would be online since it was not safe to socially gather for the celebration. I remember that he called it a 'virtual naming ceremony'. He set up the meeting on the Zoom app and sent the invite link to my dad, his wife, my grandparents, the pastor, and other close families and friends who were also stuck at home.

The naming ceremony took place eight days after the baby's birth as it was customary for Christians to name a baby after eight days. Dad, my siblings, and I joined the ceremony from Dad's laptop using the invite link. My grandparents, the pastor, and thirty other close family members and friends joined on as well. I was so excited to see and chat with my grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins live over the internet. It was as if they were all present in our living room.

The pastor started the service with prayers and songs of thanksgiving. Then my baby cousin was named: Ashabi, Abigail, Angel, Abidemi.

It was the most exciting day for me since the lockdown.

Being stuck at home has been quite boring for me as I am not used to staying at home for so long. I miss school, church, and going out to visit and play with my friends. I never imagined that a time like this would come. But I am grateful to God that I get to spend more time with my dad, my mum, and siblings, and we are all safe.

All these have taught me a great lesson that the only constant thing in life is change and one must be prepared for it. This period will surely pass, and we will be able to go out once again by God's grace. I hope to visit Aunt Kiki and my new baby cousin soon.

My COVID-19 Story: An Unforgettable Experience / A Blessing in Disguise

Oluwademilade Emmanuel Esho

It was a beautiful Wednesday morning and Mum had served us breakfast as usual. On this particular day, we had toasted bread and tea. I couldn't explain why I was excited as I had a presentation to make on the assembly. I had represented my class in various competitions, but anytime I was about to go up-stage, I always felt nervous.

I hurriedly got out of the car as Mum dropped me and my sister off at school. I headed straight for the reading room to rehearse my speech as it was few minutes to the assembly. I had barely settled into the speech when the school siren was blown to announce an emergency assembly. The excitement I felt earlier that morning disappeared, replaced with confusion.

“Our second term examination will come up earlier than scheduled, and we will have to rush it,” said the headmistress after the opening prayer and hymn. This was a major highlight of the assembly on Wednesday, March 11, 2020.

I could hear whispers, signals, sighs, exclamations, and all sorts of expressions from the other pupils, but I barely had the strength to talk as my hope of delivering a very nice presentation at the assembly that morning had been dashed.

The headmistress asked everyone to maintain decorum, and then continued after there was perfect silence. “This is because there is a directive from the government to shut down schools as a result of the pandemic. It is to stop the spread of the virus.”

When we got to our classroom, Mrs Akintunde – my class teacher – then explained what the pandemic was all about. She told us that a pandemic is any disease that spreads across continents or the entire world. She called this disease COVID-19 and said it is caused by Coronavirus. The name seemed funny to me as I have a cousin

in Corona High School and didn't expect that a virus could be named that way too.

So, I asked for the meaning of Corona. My teacher did a great job in explaining that 'Corona' means crown and the virus has a structure similar to that of a crown. I then began to imagine within me, how a virus could be as beautiful as a crown but cause so much harm and change a lot of plans, not only in my school, but country, continent, and the world at large.

I also surfed the internet to get more information about the disease and virus when I got home from school. It was from there I got to know that the novel Coronavirus originated from a seafood market in Wuhan, China, where bats, snakes, raccoon, dogs, etc. are sold as food. From there it rapidly spread to over 109 countries. I also saw that it was named COVID-19 because it was first discovered in 2019. I learned that the disease is highly transmittable, and causes a lot of symptoms like coughing, sneezing, and breathing difficulties, and could also lead to death of the patients.

Due to the fact that the disease can easily be transmitted from person to person, restricting the movement of people is the surest way to curb the spread. Hence, all schools, marketplaces, churches, mosques, and all other places of the social gathering were closed down. My little research helped me understand why the government had to take that decision.

It was difficult for me to adjust to staying at home, not going anywhere, but I had to remind myself daily that it was safe for me and my loved ones. My parents were at home as well as they could not go to work due to the lockdown. This made me worry less as I started enjoying the compulsory holiday with my family.

Mum taught me and my sister to sing the "Happy Birthday" song to ourselves while washing our hands with soap and warm water to make sure they were germ-free. She ensured that we used the hand sanitizer anytime our neighbour came visiting, and also that we coughed and sneezed into our sleeves whenever we had the cause to do so.

Afterwards, the lockdown was eased, and my parents had to go back to work as they are essential workers. Prior to that time, my school had sent them emails to notify them about online classes which they registered for me and my sister. That was my first time hearing about applications like Microsoft Team and Zoom. Our classes

were then conducted via these applications. They were quite interesting as I could see my class teacher and chat with my classmates after class.

My school also put up a 'COVID-19 Lockdown Challenge' for each week to build our creativity, thinking, and public speaking skills. My parents put me and my sister through and ensured that we participated every week.

This COVID-19 experience has not just taught us a lot of lessons but also made my school realize that the future is digital. The school organized special sessions to teach us about software applications, and things like designing a webpage and coding.

My parents also employed a music teacher to teach my sister and I music. I started taking keyboard lessons and my sister was taking violin lessons. I am really improving my keyboard skills. I have also started learning how to cook from my grandmother who is a caterer. I have learned to make noodles, puff-puff, and pancakes; quite interestingly!

Though I have had a nice time, I really miss my classmates and I really look forward to schools resuming. I also learned that Nigeria's economy has been badly hit. My grandpa reads a lot of newspapers and he told me that a lot of people lost their jobs. That is really sad. I want COVID-19 to stop so that life can return to normal. I learned that scientists are working on vaccines. I hope it comes through quickly.

The experience of the virus also made me realise that doctors and health workers are actually heroes, and I want to say thank you to them.

How COVID-19 Has Impacted My Life and the Lives of Those Around Me, What I Also Learnt from the Experience of Staying at Home

Oluwayonusimi Temidayo Adeniyi

It was all fun on Friday, February 20, 2020. When my class teacher distributed our notebooks and textbooks to us to take home, saying there won't be school for some time, at first, I thought it was all going to be enjoyment, visitation to different places of interest, to friends and family houses, but the reverse was the case when the reality of the situation hit me.

With so much joy in my heart to break the news to my daddy on getting home that day, I met his face glued to the TV screen. Thanks to the 'Press Club' which I belonged to in my school, I am familiar with news on the television. I stayed focused too, to get an idea of what was really going on.

It read: "Sometime in November 2019, the world was alerted to the outbreak of a previously unknown flu-like virus in China, in the city of Wuhan in particular..."

While the World Health Organization (WHO) sounded the alarm of this outbreak becoming a global pandemic, Nigerians were already getting sensitized on the possibility of the virus getting into the country through those coming in from places where the outbreak was already spreading. It was therefore a surprise that in spite of the very strict measures put in place by the government to screen people coming in for possible infection, news broke of the first case of an infected person in Nigeria, with more people coming in increasing the spread.

COVID-19 impacted a new lifestyle of continuous hand washing/sanitizing, social distancing, and wearing of nose mask, all which were introduced to stop the spread of the virus. The first few weeks was a rollercoaster that no one could have imagined. From having to deal with the anxiety of a disease that's spreading around the world – which kept us completely indoors – to waiting for when a vaccine would be discovered for use.

Schooling had to go online, exposing me to a lot of ideas on education technology. I can now use apps for my normal school lessons, for doing my assignments, to create animations, play games, read stories, etc. Religious

services also went online, and the experience has been awesome. All forms of social and physical interactions – such as marriages, birthday parties, child naming ceremonies, burial ceremonies – which normally attracted large crowds were severely restricted in numbers and limited to open space where social distancing can be practiced.

It is really a struggle to find ten out of twenty learners who have smartphones and data connection. Some who have smartphones don't even stay with their parents at the exact time classes are to begin. Most of the parents are sometimes at work or somewhere else when these learners have classes. Thanks to our teachers who thought to always upload recorded videos from the lessons, send worksheets and assignments, etc. to make sure my friends and I are on the right track in our education.

During this period, I have learned how to do some cooking with my mummy, and how to take care of some stuff in the house to put it in a good shape, like cleaning, washing, and arranging a few things too.

In summary, the pandemic has seriously changed the way we live and imposed on us a new way of life we never thought possible.

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Anthology of Covid Chronicles
REEL Foundation



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REEL Foundation is a registered Non-Profit Organisation that seeks to promote equitable access to quality learning for children.

Vision: We envision a society where all children irrespective of economic status or class have equal learning opportunities and develop skills that will make them globally relevant

Via our physical and virtual learning hubs for children in underserved communities , implementation of Education development projects etc. we play our part towards the realisation of our vision



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