

I've Been Here Before

By Madison McInnis, OMS-I

I see it everywhere – the boredom, the free time, the new work-from-home lifestyles that so many people have adopted. But I also see my list of lectures to watch, of anatomy structures to learn, and of clinical skills to practice despite not having a partner to work with.

I now sit at home, having converted my dining room table into my own version of “school.” I only go grocery shopping every two weeks. I go from being utterly enchanted by the intricacies of the hypothalamus-pituitary-gonadal axis to suppressing tears when the grocery store clerk tells me that I can't bag my own groceries using my reusable bags. These mood swings haven't always been my normal, but yet they also feel oddly familiar.

Almost exactly two years ago, I was evacuated from Peace Corps due to civil unrest. I went from writing my medical school application essays in Nicaraguan coffee shops with Reggaeton blaring and Spanish conversations to cafes with soft melodies and English conversations. I was furious to be back in CA, taken away from my Nicaraguan life that I had spent almost 1.5 years cultivating.

In that situation, I teetered between relief and frustration. Applying to medical school was suddenly so much easier. I was in awe at the options in the produce section and I didn't realize how much I missed driving. But I was also angry a lot of the time. I lashed out at friends and family that were just trying to support me. When people asked what my next plans were, I fought the urge to tell them they're being insensitive and instead asked them, “If you were taken away from your job, your home, your family, your friends and a significant other all in one day, how would you be dealing with it?” Trust me, I loved being back with my biological family, taking warm showers and sleeping comfortably in my own bed, but I would have loved it even more, if I had chosen to be there.

So now, I'm grieving once again – a grief that is different yet also the same. I'm overwhelmed with school, technologic stimulation, minimal socialization, and virtual chatter about the newest book interest, another completed puzzle, the latest Instagram challenges or someone's completed cranial nerve study guide. This pandemic and all associated modifications of life and autonomy dramatically changed the normalcy of my new phase of life as medical student - one that I had been nurturing so tenderly over the past year. Two years ago, the process of leaving a country that welcomed me so wholeheartedly, to then re-assimilate into the culture that raised me was confusing. Becoming a doctor through a virtual curriculum has been trying. While both incidences have their moments of uncertainty, of disappointment and of angst, they also demonstrate great capability of adaptation. These life adjustments don't stop, but instead prepare me to live my life, to overcome challenges, and to constantly be ready for change. So, if you see me crying when the store doesn't have my favorite ice cream flavor in stock, I promise those tears will pass. But for now, I'm trying really hard to find the beauty in my course work and the ability to be proud of myself for a little thing each day.