

This is How My 2020 Felt

By Charlotte Beerens

Illness, political division, and sunken relationships; welcome to the year of 2020. The year will go down in infamy as a period of chaos and will never be forgotten. Forever changing the way that I, and many others, view youth. When I was a little girl, I assumed that being older meant being happier. Being older meant responsibility, endless joys, and a surplus of peers that praised me. Being older automatically flipped a switch of bright opportunities. I now realize that this is not the case, and being older is even farther tipped to the other end of the spectrum. Maybe my young mind was grasping at something that wasn't there as an attempt to protect me from reality. Maybe I just had a good imagination, who's to say. I wish I could apologize to my younger self. She created a reality that she lived in for years, but with the help of last year's events, I let her down.

People say that you are responsible for your own future, and responsible for your happiness, and I believe that. But I also don't think it's entirely true. The environment we are placed in, impacts us greatly, whether we like it or not. Maybe that's why 2020 was such a horrible year. Our environment was corrupted and we were headed for destruction. For example, we kicked off the year with whispers of a virus from the East migrating to the West. Some families stockpiled food, home supplies, and hand sanitizer in desperate preparation for world destruction. Others sat back and expected a wave of illness that wouldn't touch their routine of life. We were given direction to socially distance, quarantine, and to mask up. As the months went by and the Covid-19 pandemic dragged on in the US, some Americans became more and more frustrated with these guidelines, and suddenly, it was a political issue. The left and right were both equally enraged with the state of the country, and neither side budged. Instead of promoting unity, the country was divided. All this is without even mentioning the upcoming election. So, how could the youth of today thrive in this environment? How are we supposed to take responsibility for our futures when normal life seems to be on pause? As a teenager in this time period, I formed opinions and was distraught over the reality of my environment. My mental health was being tested with such division and loss. My mental stability felt like a Jenga tower that was being built, and I knew that soon, it would topple. I know I'm not the only person that felt this way, but that didn't really make me feel better. It just made me feel like my generation was doomed. The Covid-19 Pandemic was the first domino to fall in the great line up of disasters that 2020 had in store for me.

World wide events aside, my own life seemed to be crumbling around me, and each day I felt that Jenga tower tip a little more. I heavily relied on my relationships, but when they ended due to disagreements, abuse of power, or bad decisions, I was at a loss. By summer, my life was a mix of self destruction and lies, and I'm not proud of it. The Jenga tower had fallen and I felt it every second of every day. At this point, I was at a crossroads; I could give in to my neglectful habits and continue to live a life of disingenuous 'joy', or I could seek true, lasting help. The former felt so easy, and obvious. Who would want to give up a thrilling lifestyle for transparency and restrictions? However, it slowly became clear to me that the right decision was the latter. I was ready to do the work. Needless to say, I embraced the help I needed, and I'm glad I did. Four months of discussing my hardships, admitting to my downfalls, and bettering my mindset was not easy. But I felt a new tower being built, and this time, it wasn't a Jenga tower. It

was a tower of brick that would not topple, at least not too easily. I often found myself thinking back to my younger self. What would she have thought about the paths I chose? Would she be upset? Confused? Sad? I'm sure she would have been truly disappointed. I think that's what hurts the most. This beautiful life that I had created was washed away by my own self. This was a situation that I had control over. I had control over my future, my happiness, and I dropped the ball. I spent time blaming my environment, the condition of the world, my peers, and even my younger self for setting up such a seemingly untouchable future. But at some point, I realized that this time, it was up to me. I've grown since then, and I've accepted the damage I caused, but there's something admirable about what I went through. Not the choices I made, but the true pain and regret I felt. It was like my younger self was kicking me, and urging me to get back up after I'd fallen so many times. I truly believe that is what kept me going.

All things considered, the year of 2020 was one that shook the world and I know we all have stories to tell. When you look back on the year, what do you see? Chaos, I'm sure. Sadness, no doubt. But is there not something beautiful that comes from such triumph? Just think about what your younger self would say if they saw you now.