When COVID-19 started to affect me, I took it with optimism that this was only going to be temporary. We are now nearing the end of October and the end still seems out of reach. This pandemic has brought fears in me that I thought I would never have to feel again. Family health, employment, roof over my head, the next meal, and my education were all at stake at one time or another. Today I sit inside my apartment in Saskatoon that I share with my partner who has been by my side since the beginning. Observing the outside world from the 10th floor I’ve seen the fall and rise of human activity on the sidewalks. There is only one certainty that I have from this pandemic experience. If I wasn’t an introvert before, I for sure am now.

I moved to Saskatoon from Prince Albert when I started University four year ago. Since then my family in Prince Albert has moved back home to Brochet, Manitoba. I adapted to the loneliness of separation but when COVID-19 struck these feelings were only amplified. Others like me, I hope, I scoffed at my mother’s words of caution. Now I listen intently as she informs me of the news back home in our small home reservation. My mother sends me news articles and social media postings of new COVID-19 cases in my area, a form of motherly duty the only way I think she can in these times. I’m glad they are so far away from the hustle and bustle of a large city, but the second wave is creeping its way back up North and I can’t help but think about the poor infrastructure and lack of medical assistance Northern communities have.

To think of my normal daily routine before COVID-19 seems like a different lifetime. These days I permit myself to leave my apartment if it is only for work, groceries, or a quick visit up to my partner’s family in Prince Albert, where I once had to routinely put my outside clothes in a garbage bag and shower before participating in any family activity. A ritual we could all relate to in our daily routines is putting on our masks, hopefully. I didn’t expect to create a collection of masks, have a preference on a type of mask, or have a favourite mask. Something I catch myself doing is thinking more about the people around me. Not just friends or families but thinking about the strangers on the sidewalks. Where are they going? Are they practicing social distancing? What do they think about the pandemic? Nice weather today eh?

My biggest challenge of COVID-19 was the passing of my aunt. I must inform you that her passing was not COVID-19 related, but everything after it was. The family decided to have a viewing in Winnipeg so I packed my bag and made the trip. I was appalled by the difference in culture between Saskatoon and Winnipeg. Before, I thought Saskatoon was starting to fall behind on enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions, but Winnipeg acted as if the pandemic didn’t exist. The streets were filled with people, not a mask in sight, business as usual, and 6-feet apart meant nothing. Navigating this pandemic obstacle course was a nightmare. My heart goes out to those who attended a funeral during these times because I understand the aches. Funeral homes enforced strict guidelines which we had to follow. One that sticks out was the 40-person limit and I remember writing down names of those attending. Unfortunately, many weren’t able to attend including my mother who would later say that she was able to go through me.

When thinking about anthropology and COVID-19 I think about how culture perceives illnesses. Over the past few months, we have seen the range of how the pandemic is understood through the numerous groups in our society. What I think should be understood from the hop is that our culture is permanently changed by this pandemic. At least in my lifetime, pandemics were often seen as something happening outside of our backyards. Since COVID-19 has taken lives on home soil I can’t see our culture staying the same. We can already see changes happening on the small scale such as hand sanitizer on every corner, taped markers on the ground, and even fashionable masks. Hopefully on the larger scale of things our culture will boost the political thinking to create plans of action for future outbreaks. This illness largely affects our lives by the cultural perception of it. How it is viewed changes the way we act around it and how our society changes. Whether we take action to the illness and make changes for the better or take no action because it’s fake news, the deciding factor on what we do resides in the characteristics of our culture.

The end of this pandemic may still be out of arms reach but I think its important to remain optimistic. This may be the biggest pandemic in our lifetime, but this cannot go on forever. When I think of my future I think about graduating. As uneasy as that goal may seem to be, I remain optimistic that it will somehow work out. It’s my final year and it is also the first time taking a full course load. Adapting to online courses has been my biggest learning curve thus far in my academic journey. I believe that to get through this pandemic we must take one day at a time and remember to be kind to ourselves.