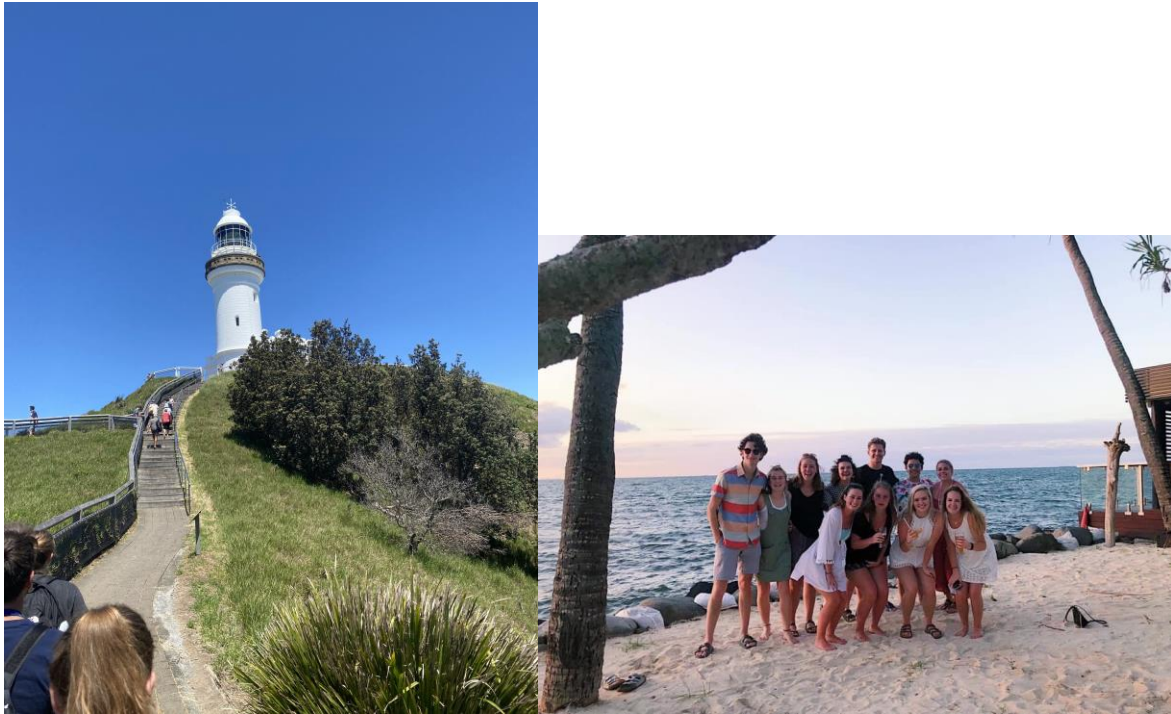


## Chapter one- life before Covid-19

It's hard to remember what life before Covid-19 was like, when you could go to the grocery store without a mask and when you could cough in public without everyone scattering away from you. Winter break 2019-2020 was a good time, I was working as a Special Education Paraprofessional full time and doing after school day care right after. I was trying to make money before I would go on what was supposed to be a four-month experience of a lifetime to Lismore, Australia. I had started my planning to go abroad first semester freshman year and would go my spring semester sophomore year. I was terrified but everyone around me was telling me how much fun I was going to have. I couldn't think about the fun I was just too nervous. I am a very big mama's girl and leaving her for so long scared me. My mom and stepdad planned to come visit me for three weeks. I was going to spend a week with them in New Zealand and a few little trips here and there. Then the day came February 17<sup>th</sup> my flight from MSP left in the late afternoon. My family and I went shopping for last minute things such as a headlight for my camping class. We then went to get Panera, but the nerves got the best of me and I couldn't eat without getting nauseous. Then it was time, we drove got to the airport I checked my bags, and it was time to say goodbye. By this point I was mess, I gave my hugs and walked off but made the mistake of looking back and saw my mom crying, I instantly ran back to give another hug. A few minutes later I walked off to get in line again. This time when I looked back my mom was no longer standing there, and I had no other option but to get in line. My first flight was to LAX where there I met up with 6 other people during out 8-hour layover. We then flew to Fiji where we would go to a beautiful island for a few days before Australia. We all had so much fun and I got burnt to a crisp. Then came the 21<sup>st</sup> when we left Fiji to fly to

Brisbane then take a three-hour bus drive to Southern Cross University. Within the first few days I made friends that would last a lifetime. We had the time of our life the first week when we spent a night in Byron Bay; we hiked, attempted to buggy board which just meant getting hit by a ton of waves due to our lack of experience.



## Chapter Two- The first hit of Covid

Fast forward a couple weeks and so many memories, Covid was no longer a subject to laugh off it was something we all feared. We had all been getting emails from our home University stating we could be called back home. The first time Covid truly affected me was March 11<sup>th</sup> when a Professor from another country came on to campus for a conference, few days later he tested positive for Covid. Campus would be closed for the day for cleaning. My friends and I made the most of it, so we went to Byron Bay again to shop and spent the day by the beach. The day next my friend and I went grocery shopping. As we waited for the bus to

pick us up, she looked at me and said, "I have a feeling this will be the last time we grocery shop here". Sadly, she was right. That night around midnight she left for her apartment not even five minutes later she ran back in tears. Her school (La Crosse) sent an email saying they have 10 days to get a flight and be back in the states. I knew Eau Claire would not be far behind. The next morning Stout emailed all students saying get back to the States as soon as possible. I got an email that day saying I had a choice to stay but had a risk being stuck for an unknown period of time. I had called my mom in tears stressed about what to do. A couple days later I made the decision to go home but to wait a few weeks to go on some fun adventures. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March I made a bet with another friend from Eau Claire guessing we would get the email to come home on Monday. It was a happy and sad moment when Monday came around. I was right so I won \$5 but it also meant I had to get home as soon as possible. I last minute made plans to go skydiving on the 18<sup>th</sup> with a group of friends. It was the most crazy but awesome things I've done. At this point I had a flight scheduled to leave the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. My friend would drive me to a hotel near the airport where I would spend the night and get on the flight the next morning. That flight along with five others after it was canceled. My mom was so stressed about getting me home she was barely sleeping. At 4am in the states she checked her phone and yet another flight was canceled. In a moment of panic and stress on the 20<sup>th</sup> of march my mom found a flight that would leave at 8am on the 21<sup>st</sup> a big group of students also got on the same flight. A bus would pick us up at 3am. I spent my last day packing, crying and trying to make the most of a sad situation. When the bus arrived all the Aussies and Americans came together to say goodbye. Ive never seen so many people cry together. It was a moment that I will never forget. The bus ride to the airport was 3 hours long and the whole time no one

said a word besides the occasional “can you hand me a tissue”. Everyone cried for the first hour before people slowly started to fall asleep.



### Chapter 3- flights home

We finally got to the airport which meant over a day of long travel ahead. The flight I was on was a straight 16 hours to LAX. At 7am my flight that was scheduled to leave at 8am was delayed till 11am which meant sitting in an airport for even longer than planned. However, we were lucky, I've never seen an airport sign with some many bright reds “cancelled.” With my

flight being so last minute the only spot left was first class which I was not going to complain about. My chair almost fully reclined and had so much leg room. It also came with an expensive price tag. The price however wasn't a worry in the days of stressed trying to find a flight. Eau Claire later said they would pay for the flight change fees and the new flight. So, thank you Eau Claire for a good seat. After a long 16 hour flight we landed in LAX where we had to grab our bags and go through customs. I was worried customs would be crazy, my friend flew out the day before and waited for over four hours. I was lucky though I spent all of five minutes in line. They asked me where I came from and let me through. I then got to sit in the LAX airport for 5 hours before my flight to MSP left. My seat on this flight wasn't the best I was in the last row in a dreaded middle seat. That was a quick flight though, it also helped that I was so tired and slept through the whole thing. I then landed in MSP got my luggage and waiting for me was my mom and stepdad. It was nice to see them as I missed them but would have liked to see them in Australia instead.

#### Chapter 4- quarantine

After a long day of travel I got back home at 6pm ate some pizza and went to sleep by 8pm and didn't wake up until 2pm the next day. I was required to quarantine after traveling Internationally, my stepdads work also required him to quarantine as he was in contact with me. My mom who was a teacher was already working from home and my brother who went to school in Iowa was already home also. For the next two weeks my days consisted of falling asleep way too late due to jet leg. I would wake up around noon most days. I found myself

feeling sad and bored. I felt like I was not motivated and had nothing to strive for. I've always been a very busy person who works a lot during my off time so not working and being stuck at home was challenging for me. During the day I got into the classic quarantine baking. I made cookies of all types and even got on the homemade bread trend. My two weeks of quarantine went by quick. Unfortunately, I didn't have anything to do so even with quarantine I still stayed home and baked way too much. Most weekends I would go to my grandparents' house and stay and talk for a few hours in their back yard, socially distanced of course. I was really disappointed about being sent home from Australia so I applied to go back again in the spring of 2021

#### Chapter 5- life as normal?

After about a month of being at home I was very fortunate to get a job working with the students of parents who are critical employees. I was helping the students with their e-learning for the rest of the school year. I was also finishing up my semester of school. My classes ended up being very little work as so much had to be changed for International students. The rest of the year went by quick which meant it was summertime. It was a weird point of Covid. No one knew much about it and you had the people who wore the masks and then the people who didn't care and went on with life as normal. My summer look fairly normal. I worked at a daycare that I had worked at for the past few years but this time I was with the kids of critical employees again. The daycare ran as normal as could but was separated into critical care and not critical just in case if they had to close down again, they could easily keep open the critical

care portion. One major change was classes could be no larger than 10 people, so one employee and nine kids. I worked that in the morning from 6am to 12pm. After that I would go home make some lunch and nanny for my neighbors which I had also done the past few years. I worked with them from 1pm most days till 6pm or so. On the weekends I also did a lot of nannying for them. Overall, my summer felt normal. Halfway through the summer a mask mandate was put into action. The governor got a lot of hate for this, so many people viewed it as he was taking away our rights. I personally didn't care as my work had already been requiring a mask and I hoped it would help to quickly end Covid. Then the summer came to an end and Colleges had to make the tough decision of what to do.

#### Chapter 6- a new college

At the start of my junior year of college starting I had three classes that would meet in person. Two of my classes met once a week in person for an hour and then online the rest. One class met in person for only 30 minutes a week and the rest were fully online. The first weekend of my junior year my oldest brother got married. His wedding was beautiful but with many changes. It was originally going to be 250 people with an inside and outside portion. The wedding quickly went down to only 50 people and fully outside. The hardest part of this was that my Dads parents were not able to attend due to poor health and worry about being around so many people. The wedding ended up beautiful as they were lucky to have great weather. Classes quickly changed to another class going fully online within the first two weeks of school. One of my professors tested positive for Covid around week 8 and since then has been fully online also. I quickly fell into a routine where I got most of my homework done on the weekend and would be able to focus on random assignments that pop up during the week.

My roommate and I started to feel very sick one week with a few Covid symptoms so we decided to go to the Mayo clinic nearby and get a Covid test. While we waited for four hours in my car we watched a daycare nearby with the cutest little kids playing outside. When our tests came back negative by roommate and I decided to apply for a job at the daycare we saw. I now work about 15-20 hours a week. I was really concerned about how online school would be but finding a routine so quick helped. Besides being mostly online a few other things that are different this semester is that I am required to get an antigen test every week. This is a nasal test that will show if I currently have Covid or have had Covid in the past. The part that is the biggest struggle is finding thing to do on the weekends. A lot of places are still closed and the places that aren't most people try to avoid due to Covid. Covid has gotten worse as time goes on. At this point we have been fighting Covid for almost 10 months with no end in sight. My study abroad program back to Australia was cancelled due to the States Covid rates still being so high. I then decided to try again. My roommate and I applied again to go to Australia in the Spring semester of 2022. I want to keep hope but with how Covid is going now it is hard to. President Trumps approach to Covid has been a very controversial subject as his plan is to basically just wait it out. We just had the Presidential Election of 2020 where Joe Biden won, from what he says he has big plans to combat Covid so fingers crossed we see a change. From Covid I have learned a lot. I learned its important to take time to check your mental health but I also learned that friendships can become so meaningful so quickly.

Chapter 7 coming soon...