

1 **Title:** COVID-19: Not a Positive Test Result, but a Positive Outlook

2

3 **Author names:** Jae H. Yoo, Nathaniel P. Mercer

4 **Degrees:** Jae H. Yoo, BA; Nathaniel P. Mercer, MS

5 **Affiliations:** University of Kentucky College of Medicine; SUNY Upstate University Medical Center

6

7 **About the author:** Nathaniel P. Mercer is a 3rd year medical student at SUNY Upstate Medical University
8 (Syracuse, NY, USA) of a 4-year program. He is the recipient of the Dean's distinction award at SUNY
9 Upstate Medical University, as well as the student Orthopaedic Surgery Research Fellowship at NYU
10 Langone Health Department of Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Division. Jae H. Yoo is a first year Masters
11 student at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. He is a research associate in the Spinal Cord
12 and Brain Injury Research Center (SCoBIRC) at the University of Kentucky with a focus in regenerative
13 spinal cord research.

14 **Acknowledgment:** N/A

15 **Financing:** There was no funding for this manuscript.

16 **Conflict of interest statement by authors:** Neither Jae H. Yoo or Nathaniel P. Mercer report any conflict
17 of interests

18 **Compliance with ethical standards:** All aspects of our manuscript have been conducted in accordance
19 to all ethical bodies.

20

21 **Authors Contribution Statement:** Conceptualization, Writing – Original Draft, & Writing – Review &
22 Editing: JY & NM

23

24 **Manuscript word count:** 1019 w/ edits

25 **Number of Figures and Tables:** N/A

26

27 **Personal, Professional, and Institutional Social Network accounts:**

28 · Facebook: N/A

29 · Twitter: @Nateecito - Nathaniel P. Mercer

30 **Discussion Points:**

- 31 • Positive spin on a negative subject
- 32 • Turning the page: COVID edition
- 33 • Looking for the light in a whirlwind of despair
- 34 • The Fauci-effect
- 35 • Increasing medical school admission rates in the United States

36 **Publisher's Disclosure:** *This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for*
37 *publication. As a service to our readers and authors we are providing this early version of the manuscript.*

38 *The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published*
39 *in its final citable form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which*
40 *could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.*

41

Accepted, In-press

42 THE EXPERIENCE.

43 The year 2020 has been nothing short of terrible, leaving society in a state of quandary successfully putting
44 a foothold for many years to come. Indeed, it is no secret that the world has been anticipating the end of a
45 treacherous year, so as the year 2021 commences, collectively we as a people have welcomed this New
46 Year with higher hopes and optimism like never before.¹ The series of events that occurred in 2020 - a
47 nerve-racking United States Presidential election and intense wildfires in Australia to name a few, while
48 egregious on their own accord, seemingly appear minute compared to the worst of all: SARS-COVID-19.²
49 The RNA virus that stood out amongst its own kind led to a worldwide shut down leaving millions without
50 work and a means for survival.³ Despite what seems like a scene from the movie Contagion, 2020 was not
51 without silver linings. You just had to really look for it.

52
53 “Now more than ever we need your talent, your energy, your resolve and your character” said Dr. Fauci to
54 new medical graduates at the height of the pandemic.⁴ Dr. Fauci’s words encapsulated a nation-wide push
55 for more physicians and healthcare workers to assist on the frontlines as we battled a virus that was truly
56 unprecedented. As a result, medical school applications have risen nearly 18% which is truly uncharted
57 territory.⁴ I think that the spike in medical school applications can be seen as a diamond in the rough,
58 metaphorically representing a positive outcome from the COVID pandemic. It is easy to focus on what was
59 lost during this year, but I think we should have high hopes for the future as well, as people have been
60 inspired and motivated to learn more about medicine and contribute to the overall health of society with the
61 intentions to prevent a COVID-type situation from ever catching us flat-footed again in our lifetime.

62 It was a year to reconnect with things that we lost over time. All over social media, families and friends stuck
63 in quarantine together used this time to escape to the kitchen and subsequently turned it into a bakery.
64 There were stories that, despite not making the front page, warmed the hearts of millions - “Quarantine
65 saved my marriage.” Once a lost form of communication, especially among the millennial generation, phone
66 calls became prevalent again, and with the help of Zoom, virtual “drinking” ensued. Moreover, as a society
67 we began to utilize and focus on what we had rather than delve into what we want. Some would argue that
68 we had no choice, but I believe this was a prime example of humanity demonstrating resilience and
69 adaptability in the face of adversity. Board games and puzzles allowed us to channel our inner-childhood
70 again, while kettle bells and tension bands kept our mind-body connection tethered just long enough to
71 outlast a nation-wide shutdown. Once the world completely opens up its arms to society again, it will be
72 interesting to see how people readjust to the ‘new normal’. Some may feel reluctant to assimilate back into
73 old patterns and the old way of life, for fear of COVID, but perhaps the majority of people will re-enter society
74 with a new appreciation of life and society instead. Importantly, COVID-19 appeared to have directly caused
75 a reduction in CO₂ emissions.⁵ With fewer cars on the roads and people working from home, there is less
76 traffic congestion which resulted in an 8.8% drop in global CO₂ emissions when compared to the same
77 period in 2019.⁵ It is no surprise that when the world opens up its arms to society again that our interests

78 will likely shift back to what consumed our former minds but it is also encouraging to hope that perhaps we
79 can see people play chess in parks again.

80

81 The devastating losses we have endured this year will forever leave a hole in all of our hearts. The racial
82 injustice we are continuing to face rages on. However, 2020 has left us with room to breathe - we can now
83 as a society strive for everlasting change for the better. We have left exposed the neglect in others' culture
84 and ways of life and in doing so have been able to make strides towards inclusion and unification rather
85 than disassembly. Xenophobia against Asian Americans as a direct consequence of COVID-19 was at an
86 all-time high.^{6,7} In spite of this, *Parasite*, won the Oscar for best picture – a first for an international and
87 Korean film. The Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS) craze continued globally and managed to be featured as
88 Time Magazine's 2020 Entertainer of the Year.⁸ Moreover, history was made when the United States saw
89 its first woman of color and Asian American Vice President, Kamala Harris, elected in the midst of the Black
90 Lives Matter (BLM) protest". Collectively, we have marched the streets for a singular movement to combat
91 racial and LGBTQ discrimination in hopes for a better future for all; and in May 2020 Crayola announced
92 its release of a new set of crayons that will allow children to better reflect the world. Despite COVID placing
93 the spotlight on the atrocities that are still prevalent in today's society, we must ride the momentum of the
94 major movements for racial and LGBTQ justice through 2021, and beyond, as we strive towards a better
95 world.

96

97 Needless to say, 2020 was a whirlwind and will likely have its own chapter dedicated to history books in the
98 years to come. But despite it all, 2020 wasn't so much as checking things off a bucket list or booking 'x'
99 amount of trips. Rather, it was a year to truly count our blessings and find value in simple things; baking
100 banana bread, connecting with friends and family, and being fully present realizing how short life really is.
101 It was a year to be grateful for all we have and knowing that that was simply enough. It was also a year that
102 may serve as a catapult into a more progressive, accepting, and promising world for medicine and
103 humankind alike. 2020 has not been easy, so remember to thank yourself for making it this far.

104

105
 106
 107
 108
 109
 110
 111
 112
 113
 114
 115
 116
 117
 118
 119
 120
 121
 122
 123
 124
 125
 126
 127
 128
 129
 130
 131

REFERENCES

1. Bonilla-Escobar FJ, Kumar AA, Farrugia-Bonnici, G, Ryan PM, Găman M-A. A Grain of Sand in the Ocean: Training New Generations of Editors, Reviewers, and Medical Scientists. *Int J Med Students*. 2020 Sep-Dec;8(3):213-6.
2. Williams, D. R., & Medlock, M. M. (2017). Health Effects of Dramatic Societal Events — Ramifications of the Recent Presidential Election. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 376(23), 2295-2299.
3. Anwar H, Khan QU. Pathology and Therapeutics of COVID-19: A Review. *Int J Med Students*. 2020 May-Aug;8(2):113-20
4. American Medical Association. Applications to medical school up big: Is it the "Fauci effect"?. Available from: <https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/preparing-medical-school/applications-medical-school-big-it-fauci-effect>. Last updated December 18, 2020; cited January 1, 2020.
5. Liu Z, Ciasis P, Deng Z, et al. Near-real-time monitoring of global CO2 emissions reveals the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. 2020, Oct 12. doi: 10.1038/s41467-020-18922-7
6. Ngo HG, Gibney BL, Patel P, Nguyen JL. COVID-19: Using Social Media to Promote Mental Health in Medical School During the Pandemic. *Int J Med Students*. 2020 Sep-Dec;8(3): 305-6.
7. Ho CP, Chong A, Narayan A, et al. Mitigating Asian American Bias and Xenophobia in Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic: How You Can Be an Upstander. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2020;17(12):1692-1694.
8. US News and World Report. Time Magazine Names BTS Its Entertainer of the Year. Available from: <https://www.usnews.com/news/entertainment/articles/2020-12-10/time-magazine-namesbts-its-entertainer-of-the-year>. Last updated December 10, 2020; cited January 2, 2020.
9. Breaux, H. Editorial: Crayons and People are not for Consumption: A Social Work Discourse on Crayola's New Box. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J* 37, 459–461 (2020).