



7-17-2023

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Recommended Citation

Hall, Mya (2023) "The Hole," *The Mall*: Vol. 7 , Article 2.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/the-mall/vol7/iss1/2>

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The Hole

Mya Hall

I remember cracking jokes about going on lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sitting in my high school's café, eating my leftover dinner, my friends and I sat around laughing about having a longer spring break. No way could they shut down the school and force us to isolate ourselves in our homes. They couldn't possibly close my favorite Mexican restaurant or limit the capacity of Target or Kroger. This idea is simply impossible. To us, it was just an extreme. And so, we kept joking and kept laughing. Then when it happened, we cheered for school online and we cheered for more time with friends. COVID-19 really humbled us after that. Soon we were not cheering anymore. No more events out, no more sitting down at a restaurant with your family, and no seeing people's faces. The shift felt so sudden and so quick. We were stuck in our homes with nowhere to go. It was truly isolation felt nationwide.

While some people made the best of their time to “find themselves”, others wallowed in the drama of *Tiger King* and rewatched all 12 seasons of *Grey's Anatomy*. Others being me.

Many picked up exercising, reading or crafting. I even had a friend master the ability to name every Taylor Swift song including the bonus tracks. We can't forget the growth in house pets that year. I'm sure all the cats and dogs that year were thrilled to be spoiled rotten with attention while the whole family was home. But I can't speak about that.

Jojo, my COVID Goldendoodle puppy, officially runs the house and experiences no consequences. Instead, she simply gets an “oh, you silly girl” or “awe look how cute she is”. She gets to swallow my hot dog in two bites, while I pet her because she tilted her head slightly and looked so innocent. Damn dog. She knows my weaknesses.

Lockdown in a way made us all introverts. We were forced to keep to ourselves for nearly a year. That long-term isolation was difficult for me to transcend from. Before Covid, I was never the biggest extrovert, but I was pretty open and talkative. I would talk to various people throughout my day, participate in class, and communicate with strangers regularly. After the pandemic, however,

it was so easy not to put all the effort into connecting with people. The forced isolation soon became self-isolation out of pure laziness and avoidance. I made it a habit to decline calls and ignore text messages. Through trial and error, I mastered the act of excuses. Hanging out after school? Sorry, I have to take my brother to work. Want to go get food? I really want to, but my mom is cooking dinner. There's a concert this weekend? That sounds fun, but I am saving up for a car. My once extroverted self was now an introvert at first by force, then by choice. I started digging my hole of isolation.

But even if it is by choice to what extent do outside factors influence my capacity to connect? Holden from *Catcher in the Rye* is consistently ridiculed for his inability to make connections and his destructiveness to them. Now, we all know he is very mentally unstable and is definitely lost in his own mind, but his traumatic experiences shaped his inability to feel a sense of belonging. Nobody really wants to relate to Holden. Why would we want to relate to this messed-up kid who hates everyone and can only use the words "old" and "phony" to describe people? But he is more than that. After going through the grief of a sibling during a crucial moment in your growth, it can disrupt your state of mind. I'll be one to admit that I relate to Holden more than I would like to think.

"I'm fine." The classic phrase everyone uses to say that they are not really fine. It's the phrase that haunts a partner in a relationship while they try to drag out what their significant other truly means. I am guilty of using this often, but I have crafted a new more effective phrase. "I'm good". It is not only vague enough to keep the person questioning, but it's also projecting a more positive tone of actually doing good. After my dad passed away, I used this phrase almost too much that I almost got uncovered. Like Holden, it felt as though I was alone in the world. I felt like a duck looking over a frozen pond. But I was not alone because people did not support me. I was alone because I ignored the calls and ignored texts. The excuses from post-COVID-19 started to become even more relevant in my life. And while after the pandemic I was already isolating myself, I managed to keep digging myself further and further down the hole.

I thought the world was against me. Whatever the universe was doing it was aiming at me. I was the bullseye to its darts. The times I needed people the most, were the times I pushed people away. I didn't accept the help offered by others. Until suddenly, the

hole I was digging myself collapsed on me. Self-isolation made me angrier and sadder. I had lost myself under the lies, excuses, and self-pity. And for that, I give isolation one star. But, I give my efforts to climb out of my hole 5 stars.