

*Essay by Sara Wells*

2020 was a year of grieving. Our country mourned for the more than half a million people lost to COVID-19. We spent a summer outraged by the deaths of black Americans such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the hands of police officers, and demanding an end to this cruel fate. We cried out for the unity of our nation when political differences were tearing us apart.

Christian author Jennie Allen wrote a book about mental health called *Get Out of Your Head*. She highlighted that our outlook on life, no matter our situation, is a decision we make, saying, “[W]e choose how we react... How often have we *chosen* to be unhappy?” (126). To her point, I believe that our cynical nature distracts us from the optimistic aspects of 2020.

Don’t get me wrong, there is a proper place for grief. 2020 was tragic, and it would be cruel of me to invalidate how much hardship our nation went through as we all rearranged our lives on a dime. I’ve grieved over the isolation, the hopelessness, and the fear of the unknown. I was anxious when my parents- both highschool teachers- started this school year off in-person, and got their wills in order before they went back to cover their bases. I was heartbroken when I heard the story of George Floyd’s death, and saw what the media portrayed as chaos and violence from rioters across the nation. I was devastated as I watched my family members grow bitter and build a lasting hatred for each other over conflicting political opinions.

But, our cynical nature covers up the good that comes out of hardship. Months of social distancing amplified the basic human need for connection we have, and through the trials we’ve strengthened the bonds we share with others. For me, cancelled activities for weeks meant a clear schedule. I had more time to dedicate specifically to my friends, and the ability to appreciate their presence more when I wasn’t so distracted by life. The protests for the Black Lives Matter movement were emotional for many. It was hard to witness people from cities across the nation coming together in outrage that sometimes turned to violence. But these

events inspired change; countless municipalities responded by changing the system. They redirected funding, restricted the forceful tactics police could use, and provided more training for officers. And while our nation is still heavily divided over politics to this day, the political events of 2020 sparked conversation. They gave citizens the chance to view popular sovereignty and democracy at work in our country, the way it was intended to.

There's a difference between grieving, which is a natural and healthy coping process that all humans experience when we go through hardship or loss, and a constant cynical outlook on our past. 2020 was a catastrophe, but it was a catastrophe that opened our eyes to the need for a metamorphosis into something better, and bigger than ourselves.