Blog
Spirituality



This is me on top of the mountain, about to snowboard on an intermediate slope. I didn't do any black diamonds, but I feel confident that I can try to do one next time. (Provided photo)



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February was not only a busy month with my position as a Good Shepherd Volunteer. It was also filled with weekend outings, where I spent time with friends and family and took much-needed breaks from the daily lull: wake up, work online, self-care, sleep.

That exact routine isn't bad, but I was beginning to feel stuck. Could it have been the winter blues, or was I getting more and more quarantine- and Zoom-fatigued with each passing day?

Exactly a year ago, I was a university student, able to choose my own schedule according to when I liked to work, eat, sleep and do my extracurricular activities. I was privileged enough to choose my own hours at my job with the university writing center.



This is my friend Marissa Dorn, also known as Rizz. We used to go to a coffee shop by our university called White Noise Coffee Co. to sip on overpriced specialty lattes and sit for hours doing work on our days off. (Celina Kim Chapman)

For my last semester at university, I gave myself two days during the week when I didn't have any classes or work on my schedule. These were days where I got to focus on my own business ventures, including making YouTube videos, doing assignments for classes, or writing for my personal blog.

For the past month, it's been a constant struggle of trying to feel what I used to feel — free and autonomous — while still being committed to my Good Shepherd Volunteer community and Good Shepherd Services workplace.

My childhood friends and I planned a ski trip back in January for the first weekend of March, hoping that COVID-19 would be a little more under control with the new U.S. presidential administration. We also decided to make a COVID-19 safety plan: We all

would get COVID-19 tests before the trip and quarantine a week before to assure we would not be exposed to the virus.



My childhood friends and me in our senior year of high school for spirit week in 2016. It is still unfathomable to me that we're still friends today, and we're closer than we've ever been. (Provided photo)

When choosing a date for the trip, we focused on finding a weekend where all of us could take off work. One of my friends is a waitress who's still in school; another works on a dredger boat in Philadelphia; a third works as a freelance filmmaker and photographer; and the last works as a saleswoman in the Boston area. Yes, we're an eclectic group, but some of us have been friends for more than 10 years, and all of us have been friends for at least six years.

Our ski trip turned out to be the exact same weekend we went skiing last year: March 6. Ironically enough, I didn't get to ski all that weekend because I had to finish my application for Good Shepherd Volunteers.

During this year's ski trip, my friends and I talked about the last year and reminisced on our lively weekend. We had no idea that in the week or so following our last trip,

we wouldn't be able to see each other for months. March 6, 2020, was the last weekend of liberation before being forced into a spring hibernation. We had our last moments of meeting strangers, going from place to place, and being carefree together.

Reflecting on that along with my sentiments from this year has shifted my perspective moving forward in my service year (and life) completely. Although it sounds like I had just another weekend with friends, the importance of this particular gathering has marked a new era of joy, freedom and light for me.

These girls are empowering, ambitious and authentic, perfect people to spend the beginning of Women's History Month with. Whenever I'm around them, I feel relaxed, able to be 100% me, even though that includes being absolutely weird and overly energetic. I didn't realize how much I needed to be around them until I came back to New York City, free from anxiety and the stress of life.



My friends and me after eight hours of skiing and snowboarding. We were warming up and ready to head back home. (Provided photo)

Now, I am trying to develop a plan: How can I feel 100% me when I can't be around my best friends? How can I continue to build our relationship when we live hours away from each other? How can I build my community here in New York City to feel like I do with my other communities?

I also tried something new for the weekend: snowboarding. During one of my other weekends away from New York City in February, I went snowboarding for the first time with my brother, and I flopped. I came back to my community covered in bruises and needing a chiropractor. For this ski weekend with my friends, I told myself I wanted to have fun and I didn't want to snowboard, just ski.

My mother, of course, told me to finish what I started. Even though she is an avid skier, she believes you cannot try something new just once; you have to try it three times before letting it go. She got me a rental snowboard before I could even oppose, and she was determined for me to figure it out and love it.

God has a funny way of pushing us in the right direction. In the snowboard and skateboard world, a majority of people lead with their left foot, but my brother and I both lead with our right foot. When I first tried to snowboard with him, I didn't have the proper gear that accommodated for my unusual stance.

This time around, with my friends, my mother specifically asked the rental-gear place for a snowboard for someone who leads with their right foot. After trying it out with the right gear, I completely fell in love with this new sport. I gained a new confidence in myself and saw a future where I could possibly inspire girls and other women to pursue snowboarding.

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Starting a new hobby pushed me to see that there is so much potential for me to grow in my life, and it is one of the key reasons I feel more motivated than ever to choose a path for my future and work toward it. I realized that even when life gets tough, I need to push through. I am now asking myself: What else can I accomplish if

I try hard enough? What boundaries can I push to better who I am? How can I find the motivation to get through when my mom's not here to force me to continue?

I am now ready to stay in New York City for the next couple of weekends and more prepared than ever to appreciate being in one place and continue growing my relationships with my Good Shepherd Volunteer community members.

Both of my community members get their second dose of the vaccine in the next week, and my mom, dad and brother will get their first doses soon, so I don't see months of loneliness and abrupt change ahead. I don't see despair and my world crumbling in front of me. It has been a harsh winter, but I can see our year of hibernation coming to an end. The sun feels a bit brighter, and I see more and more light in my future and in myself every day, knowing I am in control of my destiny and the world is bigger than I sometimes feel.

In a service year, I have finally come to realize it's OK to be a human. It's OK to take a step back and do what you need to do to come back to who you really are. I'm finally back to my bold and determined self. I have opened my eyes to all the new possibilities my life has to offer — just as long as I open my arms and embrace every bump in the road.



A picture of the surrounding mountains in Massachusetts from the top of a smaller, beginner slope (not the bunny hill). Getting out of the city and getting a change of scenery made me see that there is a world of opportunity for me. (Celina Kim Chapman)

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.