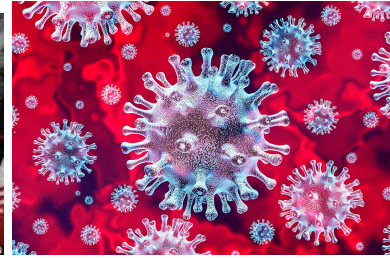


# Coming of Age in 2020

By Miles Shenk

## New Year 2020

I woke up on December 31, 2019, excited for the year to come. I was in the eighth grade about to graduate. Life was easy and predictable. At the time, my class was busy planning its Washington trip and graduation party. The news was talking about things that were far from home. The Australian wildfires, trouble in the Middle East, and a mysterious virus originating in China. This would not get into my way. I was full of optimism for the year 2020.



## School is Cancelled

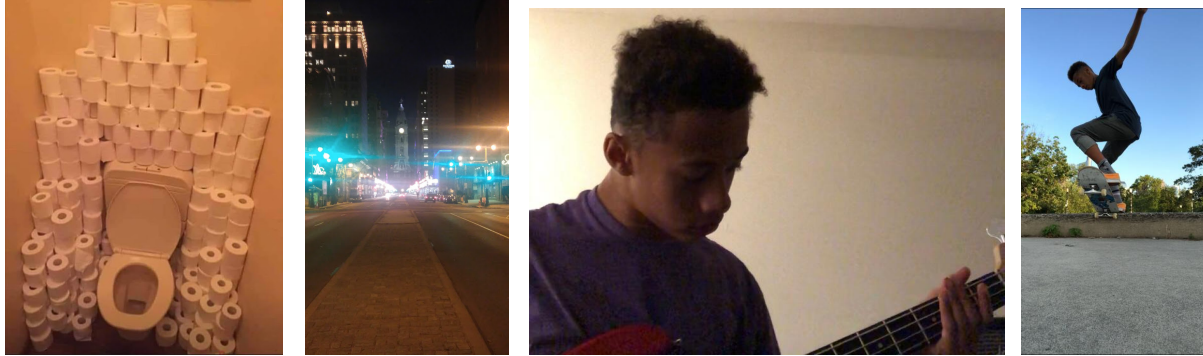
On March 13, 2020, my teacher announced to my class that school will be out for two weeks. I was excited; it was as if I had a minor holiday. I went home and went about my business. Waking up late for online school was a dream. It was a light schedule. We did not have any homework or tests. After those 2 weeks, my teacher announced that school would be closed indefinitely. We would have to continue with classes online. My teachers attempted to keep classes as normal as possible. Many of them had problems with the technology at first. My mother tried to maintain the same schedule that we had in school for music and gym. For music she made me practice my bass. For the gym, we went on long walks through the city. At first, the new routine was good, but over time it became mundane. I missed seeing and interacting with my friends. I missed having a change in the environment. My parents tried their best, but the social isolation from my peers was getting to me.



## **Red Phase (Total lock-down)**

Days blended. I had stopped watching the news because everything seemed to get worse and worse. Everyone seemed to be working and learning from home, except essential workers. Toilet paper and other everyday items became scarce. Nothing was open; everything had felt dead and abandoned. Walking on Broad Street to City Hall in the evening was the saddest scene on earth. The only souls one encountered were the homeless and the less fortunate. Center City looked and felt abandoned. I was at the darkest point in my quarantine experience. I spent a lot of time in the basement; I practiced my bass guitar. Whenever I had the chance, I volunteered to go to the grocery store with my parents because it was the only form of social interaction I could get. Skateboarding also became a way for me to get out into the world.

I felt devastated. It seemed that everything I looked forward to was being canceled. Graduation, 8th-grade trip, 8th-grade party. The last chance to walk through the hallways of my school. I felt like a caged animal. I felt cheated out of monumental experiences. My principal and the 8th-grade teacher tried to create a sense of normalcy. They praised our efforts in school during the pandemic. One day in May, when graduation ceremonies were supposed to occur, they drove to all 30 of the 8th grade student's houses and presented them with us with gifts. That really made my day. I felt so happy. They had acknowledged my hard work and achievements in 8th grade.



## **Re-opening (Protests)**

On June 4th, Philadelphia entered the yellow phase. I felt so relieved in my heart. I had a glimmer of hope. Some non-essential businesses opened-up. I could breathe with relief. As soon as I came up for air there were massive protests because of the murder of George Floyd. Philadelphia was put under lockdown again in the form of curfews because of the protests. The stores I saw reopened were closed or damaged. The open stores now had been boarded up. People from different walks of life came together to protest this injustice. For weeks protesters clashed with police officers. I live close to center city Philadelphia; I kept hearing the constant sound of helicopters and police and fire sirens. I also saw the national guard stationed around City Hall. This gave me a lot of internal unease and unrest. When I heard on the news that COVID-19 had spiked due to the protests, I lost hope of ever regaining normalcy. I was only 13. And I had given up hope of my life ever returning to the normal I was accustomed to.

PROTESTS

**26 Arrested After Entering MSB as Protesters Marched Through Philly, Police Say**

A group was moving on Broad Street just after 4 p.m. Tuesday.

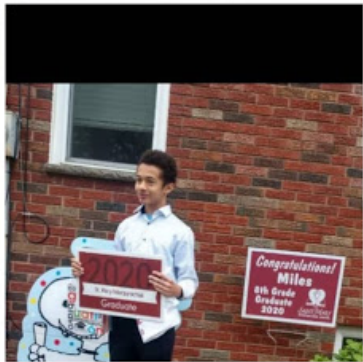
By NBC10 Staff • Published June 23, 2020 • Updated on June 23, 2020 at 10:39 pm



## Summer 2020

School ended, and I entered the Summer of 2020 with not much to do. The only thing that kept me occupied was playing bass and skating. My parents lifted my spirits and honored their promise to give me an 8th-grade trip. We were supposed to go to Vancouver, but since the US/Canada border was closed, they booked a trip to Savannah, Georgia. It was an amazing trip. I had never experienced flying wearing a face mask the entire journey. That was quite challenging. Savannah offered freedoms that Philadelphia would not. Inside dining, shopping, museums were open to the public. It was refreshing to have freedom. Another major highlight of Summer 2020 in addition to my Savannah trip was when my school held in-person outdoor graduation for my class. This was amazing. I had time to walk through the hallways one more time; I said goodbye to my friends, and I felt that there was some closure in that area of my life.





## **High School (*Finale*)**

When Summer ended, I was a changed person. It caused me to grow as an individual. I focused more on my passions of playing the bass and skateboarding. I looked forward to High School most of all, however I was cautiously optimistic that it would have a “normal” start considering the circumstances. I really wanted to go to school in person, not wanting to do 9th grade virtually. I pondered how I was going to make friends over Zoom. It seemed like an unending nightmare of social isolation.

Optimism for the hybrid schedule announced by Superintendent Hite faded when it was announced that school would remain virtual until at least November. A real punch in the gut for myself and I am sure my classmates. It feels like the feelings and needs of myself and my peers have not been considered in this decision.

As they say in show business, the show must go on. School at SLA has been good considering we are not there in person. Each class has its own personality which I am learning to navigate. Teachers and students alike differ from what I was accustomed to in Catholic school. Group projects and problem-based learning are difficult online.

Now there is a possibility that we might go back to in-person school in January. Although I am handling online school well, I am saddened by the fact that life will not return to normalcy any time soon.





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