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Hope is something you can cling to when you're confused and scared.

I remind my student athletes to remain optimistic, and that we're living history.

Everyone is working so hard.

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**The COVID-19 crisis has led members of the Kent Place community to reflect on their values and priorities.**

In March, when the novel coronavirus reached the United States, it did not yet even have an official name. Soon enough, though, it became COVID-19 and the country was on the verge of a pandemic on a scale not experienced in a century.

As the months wore on, the virus's impact on individuals widened and splintered. "We're facing the same storm," said Sutapa Sahay P '26 '30, who works in health care, "but all of us are not in the same boat."

We asked more than two dozen people — students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumnae — to talk about their experiences during the pandemic. Although everyone, even those who have felt the impact most, expressed gratitude for their relative privilege, they also talked about the hardships, the surprises, and the unexpected light.

Here, in their own words, they discuss what these past months have been like from their perspective — and what they've learned.

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# “What I Learned During the Pandemic”

I'm by myself for large chunks of time.

Our children have been able to find so many silver linings.

As a family, we started to do more outreach.

One day, we'll share stories of resilience, flexibility, and positivity.

Now more than ever, I count my blessings.

PORTRAITS BY BETH PERKINS



## “I HAVE ADDED SOME NEW ‘TRADITIONS’ IN MY ZOOM CLASS MEETINGS.”

—KEN WEATHERSBY, UPPER SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS TEACHER

“I generally start every Zoom meeting with my students with a brief thing I call the ‘Art Shelf.’ During our very first remote classes last spring, I was on Zoom and right behind me on the wall was a shelf with a small artwork on it by a friend. I spontaneously took a few minutes to show the work and talk about the formal and narrative qualities of it and also my relationship with it. Even though I don’t sit in front of that particular shelf anymore when I do Zoom meetings, I still have this practice at the beginning of classes, and still call it the Art Shelf.”

Mr. Weathersby is holding a portrait of himself painted by Jenny Ellis '09, a former student in his Portfolio Art class. It was an object on his “Art Shelf.”

### FACULTY AND STAFF



## “My parents both had COVID.”

—ANA CASAS, UPPER SCHOOL SPANISH TEACHER

“The toughest part of this pandemic has been not being able to visit my family, including my parents, who live in Puerto Rico and Florida. But I’ve learned the importance of gratitude and the benefit of focusing on the goodness and beauty that is present in every situation, even during a pandemic.”

“Everyone is working so hard. I’m proud of everyone who’s working above and beyond to get our educational system back on track, although some days I feel like I attend way too many Zoom meetings. I look forward to better days when we can cook and eat together, gather in a huddle to strategize, and spend time in close proximity with others.”

—NATHAN LUTZ, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

“I look forward to getting back to in-person gatherings. I miss being at my desk. I would greet all of the visiting families as they began the KPS admission process. Every morning, I would happily open the door to excited, and sometimes very anxious, students and their parents. The conversations that ensued would warm my heart and make me so very honored to be a part of their wondrous journey. I also miss not being able to see and hug my children and grandchildren. That has left me feeling very empty.”

—JENEANE WILLYARD, RECEPTIONIST IN MABIE HOUSE

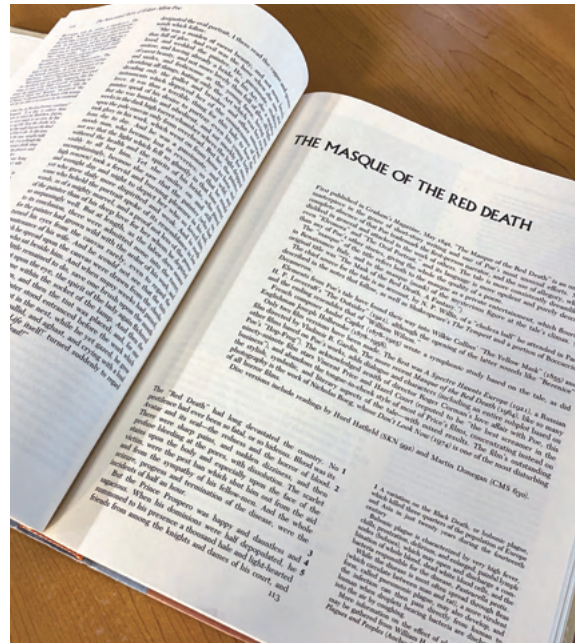


Ms. Willyard's desk in Mabie House

“On our toughest days, I remind my student athletes to remain optimistic, and that we’re living history. One of the biggest challenges since the pandemic is remaining emotionally open and available for my student athletes. It’s like riding an ocean wave across the surface of the sea — ebbing and flowing with the rise and fall of emotion while absorbing some of its force. One day, we’ll share stories of resilience, flexibility, and positivity.”

—ASHLEY QUINN P '24 '26 '28, HEAD VARSITY LACROSSE COACH

STUDENTS



“I miss being able to stop by my teachers’ rooms. In my Supernatural Literature class, Dr. Schwartz had us read a short story called *The Masque of the Red Death*, which mirrored aspects of today’s pandemic. We’ve also been talking about current events in my Government and Politics class, such as the court cases about COVID restrictions.”

—ELIZA LOX, SENIOR

“My teacher told us things would get better.”

—SOPHIA IVY, FOURTH-GRADER

“It was kind of scary during the spring, and a lot of things were changing quickly. My third-grade teacher showed us an article about COVID. She wanted to make sure we were informed about what was happening.”

“During lockdown, I had a lot of positive people around me, so I had hope that things would go back to normal. A neighbor who is my friend lives just behind me. We can see and hear each other, even from our own backyards. Sometimes we did talent-show acts to entertain each other.”

“Before the pandemic, I had never been through something that forced me to use the power of hope. Hope is something you can cling to when you’re confused and scared and you aren’t sure what will happen next.”



“I’m a freshman this year, so I don’t know what ‘regular’ school was like in the Upper School.”

—CASSIE MILLER, NINTH-GRADER

“I like seeing everyone wearing a mask, because it shows the level of respect we all have for each other. What mask do I wear? A plain blue disposable surgical mask. It may not be cute, but it’s functional. That’s how I like things.”

“I miss seeing my friends in other classes. But being able to have lunch outside is really cool.”

—JANE FITZSIMMONS, FOURTH-GRADER



“I MISS SEEING EVERYONE’S FACES IN REAL LIFE.”

—JESSICA CHOY, SEVENTH-GRADER

“Right now, I have to sit in the same chair every day. My only communication is with my family and my stuffed animals. But you should never give up. If your phone went down the toilet? Oh well! You can spend your free time reading a book or playing outside. The best part? I get to sleep in.”



**“AS A FAMILY,  
WE’VE BEEN VERY  
OPEN WITH OUR  
GIRLS ABOUT THIS  
PANDEMIC.”**

—SUTAPA SAHAY P ’26 ’30

“They are very aware of the toll it has taken on people around the world. I work in the health-care industry. I’ve had some firsthand experience of this pandemic and have seen lives lost. Now more than ever, I count my blessings.”

**PARENTS**

**“The struggle is not ever really knowing what’s around the corner. The hardest part is the unknown. Hoping your child wakes up without the sniffles or a fever. The hope that you, as a parent, make the right choices to keep your children engaged without exposing them to personal risk. I’ve had to let go of control.”**

—STEPHANIE WILSON P ’32 ’34



“I went through SARS in Singapore in 2003.”

—HUI BOON QUEK P ’21 ’22

“I was a teacher in 2003, pregnant with Francesca ’22. I knew firsthand how difficult and important it would be to stay home and be vigilant wearing masks, keeping a distance, and washing hands. We believe it’s important to let our children know what’s actually happening and involve them in making decisions. As a family, we started to do more outreach, making masks and scrubs for the frontline workers, friends, and families. We packed lunches for Bridges and made cards. We can see our kids growing up to be compassionate and mindful people.”

“Everything came to a screeching halt. All four girls play travel ice hockey, and we were just coming off a seven-month season when quarantine began. In the absence of in-person learning and their after-school activities, they were left struggling to fill the time.

“While each girl required a different level of academic support, their emotional needs were surprisingly similar. Being separated from their peers, teachers, and the KPS community created a huge void for them. I noticed that I was getting a lot more hugs throughout the day from my older girls and quickly became a substitute classmate to my six-year-old, who loved to chat while she was working during remote learning.

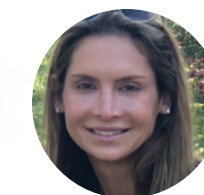
“The quality of our girls’ lives improved dramatically when they stepped back onto campus this fall. My gratitude for the Kent Place teachers, faculty, staff, and administration, who made and continue to make this possible for all of us, is endless. This year at our Thanksgiving table, this sentiment was echoed by each of our girls. They recognize and appreciate the gift we’ve all been given this year.”

—KAREN BUILIONE P ’24 ’26 ’28 ’32



“Screen-time limits and cell-phone bans went out the window. I’m so appreciative that by working remotely, I’ve been able to see and overhear the classes that my daughter is taking and is excited about. Like most parents, I typically get one-word answers during school pickup, but we’ve been able to have more in-depth conversations about her classes, likes, passions. We’ve been able to explore further opportunities for research while home.”

—NICOLE EPPS P ’27



**“Our children have  
been able to find so  
many silver linings.”**

—JESSICA GLATT P ’28

“It’s comforting to know that our children will look back on this past year with memories of spending more time together as a family, exploring the outdoors, and simply having time to ‘stop and smell the roses.’ Our lives and theirs were so busy and so overscheduled before the pandemic struck. Even when things normalize, we’ll be making a concerted effort to not go back to our old ways.”

## “THE MOST CHALLENGING THING? THE DEATH OF MY FATHER.”

—JOAN WILSON '93 P '25, MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER AND HEALTH EDUCATION TEACHER AT KPS

“Although my father was blessed with 95 years, it’s been difficult to accept that he died of complications from COVID. Unfortunately, like many other nursing homes across the country, the facility where my father resided also succumbed to the devastating effects of the pandemic. Unable to visit him in the hospital, I struggle with the fact that I was not at his side comforting him during those last hours. I believe that God doesn’t give us more than we can bear. Perhaps seeing my father lying helpless in that hospital bed was more than I could bear. I welcome the day when it’s safe to gather with friends and family to fully pay our respects and celebrate my father’s life.”



## ALUMNAE

## “I wrote about the emergence of the virus in China in December 2019.”

—LISA KRIEGER '73, A SCIENCE WRITER FOR THE SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

“I knew the United States was so vulnerable. I felt such helplessness. But COVID has created professional and personal focus. It has tightened my relationships with the experts on the front lines of the San Francisco Bay Area’s infectious-disease and public-health communities. I’m in awe of their brilliance and dedication. In turn, they’ve been grateful for my role in communicating the urgency of this crisis. I’ve given this pandemic 150 percent of my mental and emotional energy. When it’s finally over, I’ll feel proud of my small but important contribution.”



## “I miss hugging my grandparents.”

—KEILI MURPHY '20, A STUDENT AT GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

“The pandemic made me realize how important relationships are in my life. These relationships deserve more effort than I may have realized before.”



“People ask ‘How are you?’ and really want to know. Many of the conversations I’ve had through work have been a surprising but welcome source of warmth. Empathy is something that our country has lacked desperately for the last four years, and its reemergence as a result of the pandemic has given me hope. I hope we’ll be able to interact with each other with more humility, honesty, and understanding as our nation heals from this virus.”

—DANIELA QUINTANILLA '10, VICE PRESIDENT OF INSTITUTIONAL SALES AT BLACKROCK



## “I’m by myself for large chunks of time.”

—DANIELLE V. AURIEMMA '06, DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AT HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

“My husband goes into his office, and I’ve experienced an increase in loneliness. I also miss traveling to visit friends and family. Yet I feel I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge those who’ve dealt with the many direct impacts and challenges related to COVID. My challenges pale in comparison to theirs.”