



The COVID Stage

**Story by: Sue Kleusch, Academic Department Associate
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In 1997 we were blessed with a beautiful little boy. Through the years we watched him grow up into a nice young man. We had long spoken to him about the lasting effects of a great education and how his going to college was going to be his gift from us.

We watched as he took on classes without any hesitation, joined a business fraternity to make life-long friends, and bond with wonderful roommates throughout his four years. We marveled at his being able to negotiate his rental leases, tackle parking woes and keep a sense of humor. We were awed by all the community outreach he did in working with the underprivileged, how he navigated two awarded internships halfway across the country and waded through multiple job offers in his field of study.

There was everything to be proud of, as our hopes and dreams for him had come true with his hard work and dedication to his education. We had carefully planned out his graduation, had family and friends on the ready, and were planning a party to congratulate the graduate. What a milestone we were looking at and what a celebration it would be!

Until it wasn't.

As COVID moved into our society, families were torn apart. Losses of life were unbearable and job losses were at an all-time high. We listened to the news, read the papers, and nothing was more evident than we were living in the unknown world of an epidemic. There was a ripple effect of this disease and it effected nearly every person in their own unique way.

We were lucky. We didn't lose any loved ones, we didn't lose our jobs, and besides the small inconveniences of wearing masks and social distancing, we were trying to do our part to keep everyone else safe, along with ourselves, sane. Lonely it was not being able to see our family and friends.

But that fact paled in comparison to having our son's in-person 2020 college graduation ripped from his life, and our schedule. As we dreamed of him walking across that stage, getting his undergraduate accounting degree and achieving the extra 30 credits to sit for the CPA exam, all in four years, while working for the Controller and participating in out-of-state internships, we were beyond disappointed that this simple reward of accomplishment would be lost forever for this student who had worked so very hard to one day see it all come to fruition.

Covid won again. While a virtual ceremony was the best anyone could do to help these graduating students celebrate their accomplishments, it was in no way a replacement to him being able to walk the coveted stage in front of his professors, roommates, friends and loved ones.

So we framed his diploma and hope he remembers none of us wanted it to end this way; the stellar work he did will never be diminished by not being able to walk the commencement stage.

**Artist: Amanda Obenhoffer, Graphic Artist
Integrated Marketing and Communications
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View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).