

Stephany Menezes

MFT 603

March 21, 2023

Family in a Pandemic Era Essay

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, I was living abroad on a missionary base with 15 other people. Therefore, my experience compared to most of my classmates was rather different. The lockdown was not a burden, but a reward. Before the pandemic, we worked crazy hours as I ministered in the slums of Brazil during the day, and at the night until early morning, I'd be on the street corners talking about Jesus to men and women in prostitution. At that time, what I really wanted was more intentional time with God in prayer, and I got exactly that during the pandemic. I never felt lonely since my 15 other roommates always made things exciting and new. My family back home, however, did not have such a joyful experience.

When I moved away to Brazil in 2019, my brother had a very difficult time having a relationship with our mother by himself. They both have very explosive personalities, and I was always the person in the middle, mending fences and bringing peace. Therefore, when my brother and mother were forced to spend 24 hours together, it was not healthy. They fought a lot to a point that cops were called at one point as my mother wanted to send my brother to live with his father, and he refused to leave. Not only was it difficult to relate to each other due to their personalities, but their political and religious views were complete opposites. My brother decided to walk away from the Lord during this time and decided to identify as gay. This made the relationship between my mother and brother even more difficult while also impacting my relationship with my brother. When it came to things like wearing a mask and, later, getting the vaccine, it only increased tension in my household at home and also abroad.

The 24-hour tension between my mother and my younger brother during the pandemic caused their separation and a drift in their relationship. My brother has been living with his father ever since. My mother at first had a hard time adjusting to living alone but soon enjoyed it. During the pandemic, she was very worried about getting COVID-19 as she had respiratory problems, and my brother was constantly going out regardless of her condition. He would wear a mask, however, as he still does until this day, but he would refuse to not see friends during this time.

My brother was a big fan of the COVID vaccine and has had all the booster shots, unlike my mother. My mother was forced to get the vaccine for her employment however, after getting COVID for the first time back in January 2022, her prolonged leave of absence caused her employer to let her go. Unlike my family members and all my roommates from Brazil, I personally am vaccine free and choose to remain that way. In Brazil, the vaccine was pushed very heavily on the population, and no one fought against it, although many wondered about the collateral damage it could cause to one's health in the long run. My roommate, after receiving the vaccine, started having heavy palpitations and trouble breathing at times. My friend, who was a registered nurse in New Zealand, would constantly tell us of the dangers of taking such a new vaccine with little long-term testing. My friends on the base were divided and I was the last person to not get vaccinated. This started to become a problem as all commercial businesses were starting to require vaccination cards to enter establishments. Many of my friends in Brazil got the vaccine to see the new Spiderman movie. I refused and fought against it. I was already planning to come home at this time, and I knew my right as an American citizen living abroad.

My mother lost her job during the same time I had just moved back home after living abroad for 3 years, which caused a lot of stress. The pandemic was not the reason for my return to the United States but however my pursuit of obtaining my master's degree. As a person who was out of the workforce since 2019, I had to find a job as soon as possible to support my mother. I did not have time to be picky, as we needed money to pay rent and expenses. I no longer had a savings account, as I used all my finances to support myself while I was abroad. It took over a month for me to find a decent-paying full-time job, as I was unvaccinated and couldn't find a better one. I took odd jobs in the meantime, which helped us put food on the table while my mother went into debt to pay the rent. After a few months of my steady job, my mother found work, and things slowly got better. It took my mother over a year to pay her debts, but now she is in a better place. I personally suffered at my job, and it took me 5 months to be placed at my current job, where I work more but in a more pleasant atmosphere.

Due to all the unrest in the past year, the loss of my mother's job did not allow me time to adjust to my new environment. Instead, I was thrown into the busy life of being a New Yorker, and that has had a significant impact on my mental health and my relationship with God. I am still trying to find balance and have suffered a lot quietly. My mother and brother dynamic has still been very challenging; however, I am no longer in the middle of it. COVID-19 impacted

how we relate to each other and added more stress than we needed. While changing jobs, I got COVID and had to leave my other job earlier than I would have liked. Therefore, although the pandemic started off as a joyful time in my life when I was able to slow down, my family grew distant, and my return home was chaotic. We are all still trying to adjust and relearn how to not only cope with our new lives but also with each other and our differences that were adjusted during the pandemic.