

My name is Thomas Backus, and I am 28 years old. I currently live in Phoenix, Arizona with my fiancé. I am a copy editor for a retirement company.

Honestly, I never thought that the pandemic would get as bad as it did or last this long. I, like many others, am guilty of saying that Coronavirus was no deadlier than the flu. However, at the time of this writing (May 31 2020), there are currently 18,465 confirmed cases in Arizona, and 885 deaths. Nationwide, there are 1.7 million cases and 101,567 deaths.

At this point, I think we've passed the panic phase of the pandemic, and we are now in for the long haul. Many people, including myself, are just trying to get through it the best they can and deal with the sheer boredom. It's as if the city has gone into full "hibernation" mode.

But, it was definitely a slow progression here. I think my real "wake up-call" happened when my fiancé and I went out for our weekly grocery trip. We stood outside the store in a line (6 feet apart, of course), and took the recently-disinfected grocery cart. We walked down the near-empty aisles, navigating the sea of mask-wearing customers, and made our way to checkout. At checkout, each lane had markings on the floor telling people where to stand (6 feet apart) and a plexiglass barrier had been installed that separated us and the mask-wearing cashier. At that moment, I realized that this was not media-created panic, and this was not the flu. This was something new-and much, much worse than I had thought previously.

Being a history major, it's hard to think that we are living through history. Each generation has its own "defining moment," in which they remember exactly where they were when it happened. My grandparents could remember exactly what they were doing when they heard the news of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. My parents remember precisely where they were when they heard the news of President Kennedy's assassination. For the older members of my millennial generation, they can remember the second that they learned about the 9/11 attacks. However, many younger millennials, including myself (I was born in 1991), were too young to remember those events.

On the other hand, this is an event in which I will be able to remember it vividly, and one that my future children and my future grandchildren will ask me about. In fact, I can already picture them asking me in the same way that I asked my grandpa, except instead of asking "Grandpa, what did you do in the war?", they will ask me: "Grandpa, did people really panic buy toilet paper?"

My generation is very familiar with the phrase "pre-9/11" and "post-9/11" and its larger social implications. I firmly believe that we will be referring to Coronavirus in the same way.

There will be a "new normal.". But what will our "new normal" look like?