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2020 annual report

editor's letter.

2020 has been a year of new trials and memories I will never forget.

The year 2020 was very interesting to say the least. It was definitely not a year that went as planned. In December of 2019, I returned from study abroad in Liverpool, England, and I was excited to finish out junior year of college and start senior year soaking up all the memories with friends. Little did I know, none of that would happen.

Despite COVID-19 coming and putting a damper on everything, some amazing things happened this year. It is a full year of many breakdowns, but also life changing events. I participated in online school and a fully virtual sorority recruitment. It was a turning point in my academics and post graduation plans. If it wasn't for COVID-19, I might not have shaved my head, discovered what route I want to go in my career, and my passions for the environ-

ment. I also fulfilled my goal of becoming a Ms. UofM Finalist and leaving a legacy on the University of Memphis.

I took on many new habits and took the initiative to gain new certifications for my marketing minor. This year, I focused hard on my freelance company and finally got official clients to add to my portfolio. I also expanded my knowledge in different skills and fields related to my major.

I would lie if I said the year was not rough and were not times I didn't think it would get better, but I would not change this year for the world. I made so many new connections and got closer with people I did not think I would. With Black Lives Matter becoming the forefront of the year, I contin-

uously listened, learned, and advocated for the injustices the black community faces on a daily basis. I developed a new mindset on life that will continue to influence a lot of future plans. 2020 was a year of growth and firsts, and I can not wait to see what 2021 has in store for me.



Karsyn Laufenberg

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surviving a pandemic.

A year that caught everyone off guard.

If you told me 2020 would have a global pandemic hit, I would have laughed in your face. I remember never even hearing about COVID-19 until the week before spring break in March. My friends and I were on the way home from Gulf Shores, Alabama when we got the email that spring break was extended an extra week. We were absolutely ecstatic, and looking back, I do not know why I wasn't more confused on how a pandemic would end in a week. I began a COVID journal as my own "history book" with daily statistics and big news that happen every day. I am excited to read this book in the future with my kids to reminisce on the most interesting year of my life.

With the extra week off school, I knew I wanted to take advantage of it and travel more. One of my

British roommates from study abroad was studying abroad at Ole Miss that semester. She was getting deported in a few days, so I took her and other study abroad students on a road trip to the Smoky Mountains. It wasn't until we returned when we saw the full scope of the pandemic. On the way home, all public bathrooms were closed and we couldn't find toilet paper, lysol, or vitamin C in stores anywhere. My sister/roommate is an ICU nurse at The Med where she had to take care of COVID patients, so I had to move home to Mississippi all summer with my parents to stay healthy.

Fast forward to the rest of the year, it was a very interesting set of events. Everything got moved online to Zoom which we have never used before. The most eventual Zoom meetings by far was a

virtual sorority recruitment that fall. I continued to be a Gamma Chi, and it was full of trial and error. All of the awkward break out rooms, wifi failures, and never meeting my gamma chi group were the highlight of recruitment. Despite the situation, the University had multiple girls go through recruitment with a positive attitude.

This year, I discovered a new found love for picnics as a way to hang out with my friends, socially distanced of course. This allowed me to enjoy nature and have genuine quality time. Luckily, I am able to say I made it all 2020 without catching COVID, even while getting a new job working at a grocery store. The pandemic is still in full effect, so I can't help but wonder what next year will look like for me and my family.

Left: One of the many socially distanced picnics I had this year featuring my new favorite Star Wars mask

Top Right: My first virtual Tiger Elite event on Zoom for potential future Tigers

Bottom Right: Hike on Mount LeConte in Gatlinburg, TN during the extended Wellness Break before everything shut down



school and work.

The world might have gone downhill, but my academics stayed strong.

This year was rough for people's academics and jobs due to the pandemic. It made us have to completely adapt to a new learning style in an instant. I have never used Zoom before, but it became my best friend by the end of the year. Having to go from in person labs and classes to a fully virtual experience was something I thought I would hate, but it went better than expected. I managed to get a 4.0 in the spring semester when COVID hit, and I am so grateful for that.

The classes I took in 2020 really made me fall in love with my major. I took an interactive media design class that spring which is when I unlocked my love for UX/UI design. Once I took this class and went through the customer journey process, that is when I realized that is the route I want to go. In

that class, I designed a national park guide mobile app which resulted in me discovering my two routes post graduation: UX/UI design and environmental sustainability efforts.

The one downside of 2020, was the job market crash. With my spring schedule, I was unable to take on an internship, so I got a campus job as a tour guide. This allowed me to grow deeper in my love for the UofM and make connections with the admissions office and incoming students. I began the summer internship search and interviews around February... then covid hit. All of my interviews got cancelled, because all companies terminated their internship program. Tour guide ended, because we could not go in person on campus. I was desperate to find a job to stay afloat, so I

started taking freelancing more seriously. Luckily, I was hired at Trader Joes in Germantown, who became a second family to me. I would have never thought I'd love to work at a grocery store, yet here I am.

The first three months of 2020, pre-COVID, were amazing. I was elected as Director Leadership for Pi Beta Phi where I had the opportunity to show the chapter their true leadership potential, get them involved in sorority and campus positions, and host resume and LinkedIn workshops. We were also able to host a few events that semester like spring bid day, intramurals, and some philanthropy events. Additionally, I went to multiple Up til Dawn rallies and was selected to be a Gamma Chi for panhellenic recruitment for the second year in a row.

Top Left: Spring Bid Day celebration for my sorority, Pi Beta Phi, before COVID-19 hit

Bottom Left: The first Gamma Chi meeting with the new class in preparation for the fall 2020 recruitment

Right: Me in the break room of Trader Joes when my coworkers mentioned how much yellow I had on that day



new mindset.

There is no better time than now, because tomorrow is not promised.

My biggest takeaway from 2020 was my new mindset. It wasn't until a global pandemic hit when I finally realized I need to stop pushing things off to the side. COVID put a lot of things on hold for me and some things that will never happen again.

Spring finals week was when I had a little mid-life crisis, and I asked myself, "what am I doing with my life?" I began to strategize ways to live a happy life when it clicked, I wanted to start my own sustainable clothing company. It would allow me to combine everything I learned in school and my passions into one business. From marketing the brand, photography and videography, building the website, and designing t-shirts, every just made sense. I took my free time during the summer planning. Although my schedule became too busy in

the fall semester to put my plans into place, this idea will come alive one day.

The job market crash was another situation that made me rethink my plans post graduation. I began to get nervous about if it would be back to normal by May 2021 when I would need a full time job. I took advantage of this by finally pushing for my dream job: to work in the mountains summer of 2021. Luckily, Camp Rockmont reached out to me on Handshake about being their Director of Photography and Videography. This was a sign from God, because I can have my dream job while also having something relevant to my field.

The biggest event of 2020: I FINALLY BUZZED MY HEAD! For as long as I could remember, I always

wanted to buzz my head and this year I finally gave in. I have had every hair length you can imagine, and I was always annoyed by my hair. I knew the time was now while in quarantine, so the day after the football game for Ms. UofM Finalist, I hopped on my Instagram Live to shave it all off. Having a buzzed head is the most freeing thing I could have done for myself. It brought me so much confidence, and I finally felt like it fit my personality. Of course there were times people mistook me for a guy at work, assumed my sexuality, thought I was battling cancer, or customers had no filter to ask why I would ever do such a thing, but I was prepared for it all. Whoever started the stereotypes about buzzed heads, I'm sorry you never got to experience it. Everyone deserves to shave their head at least once in their lifetime.

Screen captures of me shaving my head on my Instagram Live. I donated my hair to Children with Hair Loss.



personal life.

A rollercoaster of a year full of growth and interesting memories.

2020 came with a lot of hard patches in terms of my mental health, as a lot of people did as well during quarantine. Moving back home with my parents and not seeing my friends for months outside of facetime calls will take a toll on you eventually. I was an avid gym goer and lifting weights 4-5 times a week at the beginning of the year. Once COVID hit, I was unable to go to the gym and did not work out at home as much as I should have. My fitness went downhill, and I lost over 15 pounds of muscle I worked hard to gain the past 3 years.

Despite all of this, a lot of good things changed for me this year. I finally turned 21 in time to celebrate before everything shut down, I moved into a beautiful new house in August, and I voted in

my first presidential election. My parents bought a lake house in December of 2019, so I was able to enjoy quarantine at Pickwick Lake all summer. Also, I crossed some hobbies off my bucket list such as learning how to hand sew and knit. 2020 brought me closer to some people I would have never thought I would. I reunited with my old high school best friend, who became my now boyfriend. I owe it all to this reencounter for ending 2020 in the best way possible and saving my mental health from a dark place.

I have always had a servant leadership mindset and loved giving back to the community. The first few months of 2020 I was able to complete some community service with my sorority at Memphis Animal Services where we did enrichment activities

with the dogs. We also helped at Wolf River Conservancy on MLK Day of Service.

This year was full of growth in multiple aspects, but most importantly in regards to the Black Lives Matter movement. Although I will never truly understand the injustices and oppression of black lives in America, I was determined to listen, educate myself, and be an advocate. I spoke out against racism and microaggressions, specifically against people from my hometown. I attended the Tigers Call To Action against campus inequality and racial injustice in America at the University of Memphis on Juneteenth. No matter the convictions or laws created this year and in the future, it is our responsibility to keep advocating for the black community.

Top Left: Tigers Call To Action event on the University of Memphis campus

Bottom Left: MLK Day of Service at Wolf River Conservancy with my sorority where we planted trees, cut down invasive species, and built bird houses

Right: The tote bag I made for my first hand sewn project with painted flowers



accomplishments.

Made large strides to better myself and my career.

Everything I did in college led up to this year. I was awarded the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media Outstanding Web Designer Honorable Mention for my work Web Publishing I. Going into Web Publishing I was scared to learn how to code, but by the end of it, it became one of my favorite mediums in my field. Coding enhanced my design skills by learning the fundamentals of columns and clean layouts.

Most importantly, and the main highlight of my year, was being selected as a Ms. UofM Finalist. Since freshman year, this was my end goal of my collegiate career, and I am honored to be selected. I did not have high hopes on being a finalist and doubted my impact on the University, but to my surprise, I was chosen. Ms. UofM Finalist

is a top honor awarded to a senior leader who has demonstrated substantial campus and/or community involvement in the advancement of the UofM student body and ambassadors for a campus community that is driven by doing. I was chosen alongside 10 other Finalists from a pool of over 350 nominees then underwent the process of applications, interviews, and a campus public vote.

For the Finalists, we were tasked to create a social action plan to implement if awarded Ms. UofM. My platform was "Go Tigers, Go Green," which is centered around environmental sustainability and awareness on campus. I was inspired to take this route after studying abroad in England and seeing first hand how easy it was to be sustainably friendly. I spent weeks researching what our campus

currently does and what other colleges across the United States were doing. My plan consisted of four main parts: dining, recycling, awareness, and other alternatives. Despite not being crowned the winner, I reached out to SGA to implement pieces of my plan. These small changes could make a substantial difference on our campus and on the long term planet. It will not be an immediate change, but over time, I believe the University of Memphis can become a zero-waste university.

We were announced at halftime of the homecoming football game. Normally, the Finalists would walk out on the field, but with covid, we were socially distanced in the stands. It is such a fun experience to finally see my friends after not seeing them since March.

Football game when I was recognized for Ms. UofM Finalist. We were announced at half time of the game, and the very deserving Kyla Harris was crowned Ms. UofM.



2021 goals.

2021 looks very promising and will be a year full of hope. There are many goals I wish for next year as this will be a new chapter of my life post graduation and becoming an official adult.

01 healthier lifestyle.

I want to get my health back to how it was during college. When gyms start opening back again, my goal is to lift weights 4-5 times a week and focus on meal prepping.

02 find a job.

I have a summer job lined up at Camp Rockmont, but my main goal is to find a full time job by the time I return in August. There is no telling how the job market will be by then especially in my field, but hopefully I can find a good job that will utilize my skills and passions.

03 enjoy life.

2020 was hard to fully enjoy life the way I wanted to. I hope that with vaccines, life will return back to normal by summer next year. I do not want to hold back on living the life I want while I am still young.

04 continue learning.

I will graduate next year, but I do not want to be stagnant in my education. My goal is to continue learning and getting better every day, whether that be in my career or personal life.

05 take time for personal projects.

All throughout college, I have not had time to do the personal projects I wanted due to school and involvement. I want to utilize my post graduation free time by finally completing things on my list such as getting into product photography, exploration in UX/UI design, and designing a board game from scratch.



@karsynjade
@kar.creative