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My Server, My People

Guiv Lederer

“Community” is such a broad term. It can sometimes feel impossible to define. You will never truly know the whole story about a community unless you are a part of it. While there are many communities that I appear to be a part of, I want to share a story of one that may not be so obvious. This community is a simple one—a fleeting one. It only existed for a few weeks, but what a special couple of weeks they were. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that came with it made for an unprecedented time for everyone. I remember watching the NFL draft in April with my family more than a month into the nationwide lockdown. When Chief Medical Advisor Anthony Fauci made a speech before the draft, my younger brother made an astute observation, pointing out the overuse of the word “unprecedented.” I realized he was right. Everyone seemed to be using that word to describe what was going on, and we hated it. It became like a cliché only the two of us noticed. Of course, it is hard to use any other word to describe what occurred, what is still occurring. I know many people who struggled, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Fortunately, I was able to form my own little community to help me get through the tough times—a community that could only exist in those specific circumstances.

At its inception, Discord was a counterpart to Skype and TeamSpeak, used for remote voice communication while playing video games. My brother and I were early users, hopping onto Discord in its beta stage. Skype was fine, but it was never optimized for gaming. TeamSpeak was meant for gaming, but you had to pay a fee. Discord was an amazing free alternative that combined the best parts of both. You can call your friends, just like Skype, but the main draw of Discord is its servers. You can create a server and invite whoever you want to it, and you can even customize the servers to your liking. Discord has come so far that it has essentially become its own social media platform even though it started as a remote voice communication service for gaming. Large servers popped up with millions of members. These servers have leaders, moderators, and administrators, and you can work your way up the ladder in servers that matter to you. In fact, they are no longer known as servers—they are now referred to as Discord “communities.” Still, not all Discord communities are massive: I have a small Discord community with a small group of friends, some of whom I only know online.

The COVID-19 lockdown created the perfect reason for people to turn to gaming as something to fight through the boredom and loneliness of being in isolation. Discord is the perfect remedy. Not only do you have friends to talk to on Discord, but you



have options on how you want to spend your time on the Internet together. For weeks during the beginning of the lockdown, there were people logged onto the server at all times. As soon as I would wake up, I would log on. It truly felt like I was never alone. It was like living with a bunch of roommates. I read a new article every day about how mental health has been adversely affected by pandemic isolation. I can thank Discord for saving me from that.

This picture was taken at 10:50 p.m. on March 19, 2020, right in the middle of our little community's peak hours, between 9 p.m. and 12 a.m. We were usually finished with our online classes and homework by then, so we were free to log on. In the beginning, we played the same video games we always had: mostly Fornite and League of Legends. But playing the same games over and over again becomes stale, so we turned to playing games we had not touched in years. We played Minecraft, Rust, Unturned, Overwatch, and World of Warcraft, among others. It was a blast. But every night, my highlight was always League of Legends. I have been playing League of Legends since November 2013, and it has never gotten old. As a 5v5 competitive game, we were bound to be excluding someone if we had more than five people online, which we often did. But there's one catch: If you manage to get ten players together, a true game of 5v5 can be created within the group. There is nothing in the world more fun than that. Not only are all your teammates your friends, but all of your opponents are good friends as well. We usually managed to get ten people together maybe three or four times a year. It was happening daily during these "unprecedented" times.

We eventually got tired of the video games and found other ways to spend our time together online. We hosted an online chess tournament. We played online Pictionary and spent many nights helping each other with homework. Discord had also just added a feature that allowed game streaming, so we could always just watch a friend play if we needed something to do.

Beyond all of the specific things we did, simply having friends around meant so much to all of us. Many teenagers struggled during quarantine. According to Rima Himelstein, a pediatrician and adolescent medicine specialist, the COVID-19 quarantine was an "emotional tipping point" for many teens. This is not just a story about having fun and goofing off with my friends. We were a community that saved one another. I have friends who are depressed. I have friends who struggle. Even within the context of my small Discord community, I know there are people who are going through much more than me. fowpes is stuck inside with three other family members in a one bedroom apartment. !! raiaioxie has spent the entire lockdown with his mother, with whom he does not have the best relationship. Our community was not just a place to play video games. It saved us. It saved us from the depression and anxiety many teens faced during the pandemic.

And now, an introduction to our community:

Misha is king (real name, Luca): I met him playing Minecraft when I was nine or ten years old. We would Skype while playing Minecraft together. As it turns out, he lived in New York City as well, and we ended up becoming friends in real life. Today he is one of my closest friends.

UrMyDad (real name, Josh): Josh is another one of my closest friends in real life. We have been friends since he transferred to my school in the 6th grade.

!! raiaomoxie (real name, George): George was my brother's elementary school best friend. As it turns out, he is a video game prodigy. He's good enough to be ranked in the top 100 North American League of Legends players, and he plays with professional players. His handle is a name that I gave him when we were very young. He is very forgetful and constantly forgets his login information, so he continually needs to make new accounts with slightly different spellings of Ralamoxie.

bigmoist (real name, Inigo): Another one of my best friends from sixth grade. He does not play many video games, but he always brings a positive energy to the call.

DankSquatch (real name, Linus): Linus is yet another best friend from sixth grade—there are many in our Discord who fit this criteria. He is ultra-competitive, and he credits me for teaching him a lot of the things he values today.

fowpes (real name, Edmund): Probably my best friend. There is always a cheer when he joins the server. He rarely finds time to play, but when he does he plays for hours on end. It is very frustrating. He has the most interesting sense of humor and everyone loves playing with him.

Rythm: Rythm is one of the coolest aspects of Discord. Rythm is actually a bot that will take commands if imputed into the chat. Rythm plays music to everyone on the server.

ZectivezZ (real name, Damien): No one really calls him Damien. He changes his handle every few weeks, and it is impossible to keep track of all the changes. He is mostly quiet, except for when my younger brother is playing. For whatever reason, they seem to despise each other, and they have an absolutely hilarious gaming rivalry. I have never met Damien.

Buulin with my blokes (real name, Sean): We have been friends since kindergarten. He is not one of my best friends, but he has always been one of my closest friends. Sean's handle's is constantly changing. He takes forum posts from the Internet and pastes them in as his username every few days. It usually makes no sense.

Guiv (real name, Guiv): Myself. I am the only person whose handle is the same as my actual name.

heaven (real name, unknown, but he goes by Chip): Everyone just calls him Heaven. He is from China but moved to Canada for school. Though he speaks very little English, he is one of the funniest people I have ever spoken to. I have never met him in real life, and I have no idea what he looks like.

These are just the people who were on the server at 10:50 p.m. on March 19, 2020. These are just a few of the people who made my quarantine so special. Together we turned a pretty bleak reality into memories we'll never forget.