

To Whoever will listen:

This is my story. I understand that people have different opinions about the craziness that has taken the world by surprise over the last couple years, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, I ask that you listen with an open mind and try to understand where I am coming from. I am going to start by humanizing myself. I have noticed, especially over the last couple months, that our country has been divided. This may not have been anyone's initial intent: yet, in doing this people do not see other human beings anymore, they simply see "the other side". I hope this sparks some compassion; I would like you to remember that I am still a person with the same emotions that make us human, even if I share a different view than you.

My name is Cassidy Odgers and I am an eighteen year old who currently resides in Calgary, Alberta. I have an amazing family; a mom who has done everything for me and my younger brother, and a Dad who works months away just to provide for his family. Before the month of September, I was living back home in Rocky Mountain House Alberta, where I graduated high school, worked, and met some amazing people. Moving out has been no easy feat, as I'm sure most of you reading can understand. It's a little lonely and a great deal stressful moving to the city, but I knew in my heart it was time for a new journey. I became a student at the University Of Calgary, which was beyond exciting at first. All of those years in high school had to be for something more right? However this excitement was quickly destroyed upon learning that my classes were now online. I feel trapped in an unfamiliar city; I miss home and am stressed out about my schooling. What's worse is the feeling of discrimination promoted by the university and social media about the vaccine. It is difficult to feel accepted when half the population has made it clear that you are not welcome based on a personal belief. Now what makes this especially hard for me is the experience I had in highschool-- something I wouldn't wish upon anyone. I hope that I never have to go through it again.

In April of 2021 I tested positive for the B117 (UK Variant) of COVID-19. I took all the appropriate steps, alerted my close contacts and the principal of my high school before AHS contacted me. After isolating for the mandatory ten days, I returned back to school only to find that the confidentiality that I was entitled to was not respected. (Keep in mind that my school had a little over 200 kids, so this did not come as a surprise to me.) However, the treatment I received from my peers moving forward did. I'll never forget the first class back, I was early as I was beyond nervous and just wanted everything to be normal again. Unfortunately, this never happened. My stomach dropped when my classmates started trickling in and no one would sit with me. Nobody would even talk to me. Not even the girls who had been my friends all throughout school. One friend eventually went out of her way to sit with me because she was not mad at me for something that was not my fault. For that I am grateful, as she is what got me through the last couple months of highschool. The story doesn't end here. That same first class there was a substitute teacher who was not informed the class had been isolating and that it was our first day back. After being told by a couple students that we had been at home learning she proceeded to ask what had happened. She received a yell from the back that "some dumbass got Covid". To make matters worse, she asked who-- the whole class proceeded to turn and look at me, with one girl going as far as to say my name. I'm not joking. So there I was hood up, mask on trying not to be too loud as I cried through my first class back. The situation did not get better. I won't get into too much detail, as this is not the main point of my writing, but the last months of highschool were completely ruined for me by other kids looking for someone to blame. Looking back I think the hardest part was not being able to understand how people could see someone so clearly in pain and keep hurting them. But then again that is why this story is valuable, as it shows how easy it is to dehumanize others.

With the recent mandates from the university, many students feel that they have been given a choice; get vaccinated or be refused higher education. This may not be the intent of the schools, but this is how it is coming across. What's more

upsetting is that these institutions have seemed to forget that their first priority should be to their students and the minds that go to these schools to grow as an individual. However, through the constant change and these harsh rules students have been put under constant stress. I can't speak on behalf of everyone, but personally, it's been eating me alive. Getting out of bed, eating, and sleeping has become harder. I am mentally exhausted all the time and I feel I never know what is going to happen next. What's more is the worry of what happens with tuition if I am unable to go on campus next semester. What will happen to the students whose student loans have already been approved and accepted if they do not bow down? I feel physically sick thinking about my educational future because I am stuck between my beliefs and these tyrannical mandates. Furthermore, it seems like the universities have thrown out the values they once stood so proudly for. What happened to teaching young minds to form their own opinions? Going to post secondary is supposed to help young adults learn how to make choices and form thoughts outside of what they grew up around, but now these very same schools are forcing a single opinion on them. How is it okay to tell thousands of people that it is their body, but not their choice.

My name is Cassidy Odgers and I stand for freedom of choice. I have nothing against people who do or do not get the vaccine. I simply believe that it is not right to put this pressure on students, employees, and athletes to stand for what they believe and be put at a disadvantage or fall in line. Canada is said to be the home of the free, but right now I and many others feel it is anything but. I am begging anyone who reads this to take a stand. The world is in a time of great need, but we have been pitted up against one another when we should be standing together. My heart goes out to the others who don't know how much more of this they can take and it breaks my heart at the amount of youths, including myself that are seriously considering dropping out of school because it feels we have no other choice. To anyone relating to this, know that you are not alone and it is time for us to come together and fight for our freedom.