





A New Kind of Family

**Story by: Chloe Falcon, Student
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

When I remember the COVID-19 pandemic my mind goes to rapid closures, faces armored in masks, and nightmares. And of course, ramen noodles, knitting, and Marvel movies: some of my favorite ways to pass the time during the “Safer at Home” order.

When the United States was thrown into a rapid lockdown, my university closed its physical doors as well. By the hundreds, students filled up suitcases and fled, uncertain when they would return, leaving a few of us behind. In 2020 I was living in one of the dorms on campus and working as an RA. If we chose to, we could stay on campus and continue to work and complete our nightly rounds in mostly empty buildings. I was one of the few who chose this option. Eau Claire had become my home, and if I was going to quarantine, I wanted to do so in the comfort of my home.

I spent my days alone, gazing out my window at an empty parking lot that had felt so full a lifetime ago. Mornings I had classes, staring at empty spaces where student’s faces should be, but were often blacked out, microphones muted. A chorus of silence. Lunch brought a trip down two flights of stairs to the lobby of my dorm, where I collected my prepackaged meal to be eaten alone in my room.

I lived for the night. As soon as classes were over and we were done with our work for the day, I would grab my knitting basket, a quarantine hobby I had picked up, and meet up in the basement of Towers Residence Hall with one of my coworkers Allie and an RA named Mengcha from another dorm. Mengcha was determined to watch the entirety of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and he chose us to complete this with. I have no memory as to how or why this began; I had just met Mengcha a few days before the lockdown, but these nights became my saving grace. We would meet in the basement, pull in these big comfy chairs, line them up side-by-side in front of the TV, and pile on the blankets. I enjoyed living beside such few people in a building meant to hold half of the freshman class. There was no need to plan and reserve the TV lounge; we were the only ones there to enjoy it.

We watched the movies in order of release date, not chronological order, something that at the time seemed very important to Mengcha. Before the movie started, we would make ramen in the microwave of the kitchen in the room next door. We would take our ramen, cozy up, and play whatever movie was next on the list.

As the months passed, my blanket grew longer, and my love of Marvel movies and these two friends grew stronger. During these nights, I was home. Not a home with my family but a home I created with two people who weeks before had been practically strangers to me, and who now felt like family.

Artists:

Erin Phelps, Student

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Natalia Sexton, Student

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).