

# finding FULFILLMENT

*Despite frustrations of online school, social isolation, Stephens has flourished during the pandemic by getting creative*



**P**urple LED lights reflect off the phone screen as the time changes to 11:12 a.m., the exact minute that sixth-period classes begin. freshman Emmylou Stephens sighs in relief. She can join the Zoom meeting of Mr. Ken's A/V Production class. Since middle school, video editing, production, and graphic design have been a passion of hers and during a time of online learning, it has become something to look forward to even more.

After spending nearly an entire calendar year with only her brother, parents and pet Eclectus parrot, Sprout, to keep her company, Emmylou has funneled her restless energy into projects and videos both in and out of the virtual classroom. So much had changed so fast and the familiarity of film was being comforting.

Her love for film production came on rather fast, as before the eighth grade school year, Emmylou had been a successful student as a theatre major at Lamar.

"Whenever she really gets into something, she's very passionate about it," said freshman Lily Hobbs, one of Emmylou's longtime friends. "Not necessarily with school, but really anything, like her bird, or makeup, or shows and music."

Hobbs has seen how Emmylou's interests have evolved over the years. Hobbs often helped out with Emmylou's A/V productions project, whether that was as an actor in a video or as a critical eye looking over the details of a project. Back when Emmylou was a part of the theatre program, Hobbs observed from afar, acting as more of an appreciative audience member and less a helpful assistant.

"Obviously theater and cinematic arts are very different but I like how they're both creative and how

I can work with other people."

That's something that Emmylou comes back to a lot. The people. Like so many high school students, the pandemic has left her feeling isolated.

"She stays in her room most of the time," Miller Stephens, her younger by three years brother said with a laugh. "She likes working alone on filming and stuff."

Currently, she is working on a short film project where she uses inanimate objects as the characters. She has written her scripts to purposefully exclude the need for other people since her options for actors are limited.

According to Emmylou, this lack of group projects and abundance of freedom has made things "less stressful." In some ways, however, this lack of in-person interaction and community is hard, especially since Emmylou is new to McCallum and has yet to experience her program in person at all. Until she finally goes to classes in person, she has no idea how her current class will compare to what she experienced in middle school or how she will approach collaborating with her peers.

Even within some of her strongest relationships, social interactions feel distinctly different. Hobbs feels similarly.

"Talking to any of my friends in person is a little awkward now, but we text all the time so I don't think we're any less close or comfortable with each other," she said. "I think a lot of my friends have changed a lot over quarantine, not in a bad way, but we have a lot of different interests now that we aren't spending all our time at school."

Despite all the struggles that have come with being a virtual student and the loneliness that has come with

the pandemic, Emmylou has been putting in the work to make up for some of what she has lost in the social aspect of her life. Though it's been difficult being trapped in the same house as her younger brother, Emmylou has been attempting to form a stronger bond with him.

"We get along OK; over coronavirus, she started watching some of the same animes as me," Miller said. "So now we're watching Hunter x Hunter together."

It's the simplest thing that can remind Emmylou how valuable her interpersonal relationships are and how remembering to take care of her mental and emotional needs are important. Even though she enjoys her major and being a part of the Fine Arts Academy, sometimes the pressure can be overwhelming.

"I've been doing online school this whole year," Emmylou said. "Managing it all on my own can be stressful but at this point, I'm used to it."

Sadly, being "used to it" doesn't always mean that it's easy. When Emmylou was applying to the Fine Arts Academy, she had no idea that her freshman year was going to be 100% online. She's trying, however, to focus on the positive. Her grades haven't slipped as much as she thought they would, and even if motivation is hard for students to come by these days, hope for the future school year is keeping her afloat in the sea of uncertainty surrounding mask mandates, vaccine distributions, and schools reopening.

"I think if I were in-person I would appreciate it a lot more so hopefully next year I get to actually go into the building."

Story by Francie Wilhelm