

Isolation and Animal Crossing: Nintendo Switch game is saving my mental health during quarantine.

Story by: Nat Huber, comic artist for The Oracle

I couldn't tell you when the last time I spent time with my friends was. Or the last time I walked around my neighborhood or went shopping.

Alternatively,

I could tell you about how I mindlessly wandered around my island for hours. Or how I spent 110k Bells on an overpriced shower at Nook's Cranny, or the fun interactions I've had with Raymond.

With everything closed and being stuck at home, my depression has been worse than it has been in a long time. I felt like I had no reason to get out of bed. Why should I? My job's closed and I'm not going to school, why should I bother? I'm not consistently talking to or seeing anyone besides my mom. This lack of stimulus caused me to burnout with art. I've had no new ideas and if I did, I barely ever finish anything.

I felt like I hit rock bottom all over again.

It felt like the only thing I had to look forward to was the release of "Animal Crossing: New Horizons." I've struggled with depression and anxiety for years. And for a long time, I wasn't doing anything about it. I was digging myself into a deeper and deeper hole, simply because I thought my depression made me who I was. That my mental illness defined me. And while I know now that it isn't true, only within the last year or so have I actually been letting myself get better.

So, what does this have to do with Animal Crossing?

A lot, if not everything.

I had always vaguely known about Animal Crossing, but never played any of the games myself, despite only ever owning Nintendo consoles. After hearing and reading many people's stories with the series and how it helped them, I decided to bite the bullet and bought "Animal Crossing: New Leaf," many years after it had already come out. And I was hooked. When "New Horizons" was released on March 20, 2020, I became just as, if not, more invested in my virtual life. "Animal Crossing: New Horizons" has been my crutch for getting through these rough times.

For one, it gives me something to look forward to, each and every day.

I was struggling with finding reasons to get out of bed, to even be awake in the morning. Animal Crossing gave me something to look forward to. I wake up and grab my Switch, excited to see how much my flowers and bushes have grown. To hear about Isabelle's TV habits and see what the shops are selling that day. I look forward to talking to my villagers—social interaction I've been lacking in real life. Each day feels valuable to me. Even if it's just a small thing like seeing my favorite villagers (it's Raymond and Rosie for anyone curious), it's something.



And I need something.

Animal Crossing gives me the socializing I'm lacking. It gives me friends when it often feels like I don't have any.

The villagers on my island provide regular interactions. While I often go days or even weeks without talking to my friends because the thought of trying to do so makes me feel tired, talking to my villagers is the opposite. When Bluebear called me her "bestie" or when Soleil tells me how happy she is I've talked to her a bunch that day, these little moments brighten up my day.

Animal Crossing gives me an escape.

The past few months or so have taken a major toll on me. I'm putting more pressure on myself than ever since I have so much time each day and every little thing has bothered me more than it normally does. I'm trying to force myself to get as much work done as I can every day, even if everything I churn out is mediocre at best. I chose to do online work for a class I already have a good grade in simply because it's not the highest grade possible, only for my brain to shut down whenever I try to work. "New Horizons" helps me destress and get away from the world for a while.

The Animal Crossing series has always been known for its escapist nature. It gives the player a peaceful world where you get to live out a life in a town full of animals. There's no rush to get things done, no deadline to stress over. Some villagers will even remind you to rest, to do nothing every once in a while. The calm atmosphere has helped me destress a lot during these extremely stressful times, not to mention giving me the feeling of going out of the house.

Animal Crossing has been vital in helping me keep my head above water during this extremely lonely period. My thoughts feel clearer when I'm playing the game, as if all of problems just wash away. While the only thing I've been drawing is the characters from the game, I'm getting something done. And the more little things I get done, the better I feel. I'm slowly gaining control of my motivation back, and "New Horizons" is to thank.