



Telling Our Stories: Western's Response to COVID-19

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I'll never forget the night when my boyfriend first told me about the cases in China. It was December 2019 and I never could have predicted that it would ever reach the US. "This is going to get very bad if it spreads," he said. I usually try to block out upsetting news due to my severe anxiety and being already a citizen of the United States, I had had enough of it. I didn't need anything else on top of the upcoming election drama and constant reporting on what the President's daily tantrum was. Every single day my boyfriend updated me on the virus situation, and it wasn't until the first cases reached Washington State that I started to really get worried. Fast forward to March 2020, I received an email that the last week of classes were going to be canceled due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 and I realized that things were going to get even worse than I had imagined. Once the pandemic was in full swing, I made the decision to move back home, and I have been staying at my parent's rental property in Seattle through the whole of quarantine. This has been very convenient since my parents live directly next door, allowing me to see them daily and assist them, yet still remain somewhat distant. Dealing with the emotional side of the pandemic has not been easy and certainly having my social life ripped away from me has been incredibly tough to comprehend. It is hard to believe that I went from seeing my friends and classmates every day to full lockdown and only going out to get essential supplies. My only solace has been my new obsession with plants. Having seen so many "Plant Life" videos on the trending social media app Tik Tok, I started buying all kinds of different species of indoor plants left and right. It felt good to be able to have something to keep my hands and mind occupied that wasn't on a screen. Before the pandemic, I had never really been that interested in plants. It turns out that not being able to leave the house makes one appreciate the little things. When it comes to schooling, I thankfully have been continuing to receive good grades throughout this pandemic, however, I truly despise online learning. I miss walking through the Arboretum to get to class and talking to other students face to face. Having class on Zoom is so impersonal and exhausting and I am sick of looking at a screen for several hours at a time. Most of all, I miss the freedom of being able to go anywhere and do anything with anyone without having to take precautions and fearing for my life. I am one of those people who needs routine and mine was flipped upside down. I have had to adjust to the new normal and it hard to believe that life can get back to normal in any way. I'm sure that in a couple of years, when most people are vaccinated and more studies come out, that I will feel a bit safer. Until then, I will remain holed up in my little one-bedroom rental cottage with my boyfriend and his dog, obsessively wiping down everything that touches the outside world and washing my hands until they are raw.

End of contributed text from Maggie Beton