



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

Story ID: 63

Source: "Telling Our Stories: Western's Response to COVID-19," a project initiated at Western Washington University by Western Libraries Heritage Resources division. Originally published online at: <https://mabel.wwu.edu/islandora/object/wwu:37686>

**Story date** 11/17/2021  
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### Story contribution

It was the end of February in 2020, I was sitting on some concrete steps on a stranger's stoop in North Carolina. The air around me was muggy, clinging to my clothes. Forming beads of sweat on my brow. Spring was coming quickly. It was 75 degrees outside; I could hear the crickets chirping among the weeds as I smoked. Scrolling endlessly on my phone, reading the news. CORONAVIRUS. 3,000 miles+ from my home, my family. My thoughts running faster than the speed of sound. Loud and muted at the same time. I was already dealing with unfortunate circumstances, this added layer only made things worse. I read an article; the North Carolina/Tennessee border would be closing. National Guard would be stationed in the connecting mountain pass. No one in. No one out. It was roughly 3pm. Watching my dogs chasing each other, happy. I had a choice to make.

I chose to leave. I went to the nearest grocer in search of supplies I could purchase with my food stamps. The shelves were bare overnight. I fought a woman over the last bulk package of Vienna sausages. An item that normally caught me sneers. "I don't have a kitchen to cook in, unlike you!" I exclaimed. Cradling my meal plan for the next few days. Vienna sausages, tortillas (they were out of bread), cheese, and some condiments. I left around 4am the next day, Washington bound. As I started off down the road, gas had dropped overnight. 2.85 down to 1.09 a gallon. The roads were empty, even in the industrial portions of the city. It was eerie. Fog had settled into the valley, obstructing any views off of the main road. Town felt like the set of the film *'Silent Hill'*. Abandoned and full of unseen horror.

I made into Tennessee. National Guard according to the news on my phone had set up a barricade an hour after I had crossed. I wondered how many other states had similar plans, to launch military presence at its borders. I made it back in Washington in 4 days drive time. Coast to Coast usually takes me at least a week. Anxiety and caffeine pushing my body to its limit. My mouth constantly tasted of dehydration, stale, rough. My throat was constantly dry on this drive. My lungs tired from the copious amount of tobacco I had smoked to steady my nerves. I did manage to make it home, in one solid piece.

When I arrived home, things weren't as terrifying as they seemed. Masks weren't indoctrinated yet. While I held apprehension the deaths weren't escalating as quickly here as in other states. I stayed home with my parents, went grocery shopping for them. Upon arriving home, it was an entire ritual to grocery shop. Bringing the groceries in, wiping them down with Lysol wipes. Then allowing them to sit for 3 days outside of the kitchen before cooking. I did miss fruit and fresh veggies during this period. None of us were sure how contagious the virus was, or how it was transmitted. Better to be safe than sorry. I continued to see two of my close friends, outside only of. No apprehension then either. Every person was a recluse. Walking trails of the forest, running my dogs. Adding a plethora of rocks to my collection with every place we went.

Fast forward a couple of months. It's June, summer has sprung. Things are slowly starting to escalate, but as long as you remained outside and socially distanced from others. Things seemed okay, until I woke up one morning and hell had broken out on the news. The *'Black Lives Matter'* protests had broken out across the country. People banded together, arm in arm, wearing their masks. Chanting in the name of George Floyd and systemic injustice. This fight continues to come to the table, decade after decade, the same demands being repeated by different faces. Different bodies line up to be abused by police, in the name of change. This would be the first time I've ever had the time to get emotionally invested in activism of any kind. My epilepsy kept me off of the front lines, but it didn't keep me from finding my own way to contribute.

We're already halfway through November of 2021 as I'm writing this document, yet I'm still processing 2020.



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Time is such a fickle thing. Some days drag on for what seemed like an eternity. Other days, my mind is completely blank like my memory has a large gap. A few days in particular feel like Groundhog Day. Whose to say. As restrictions lift, I'm terrified to move into dorms next quarter. I'm upset by the lack of online options being offered at Western. While I will do it, and push through the discomfort of the situation. I don't have to like it. I was never very good at being social. My self-induced isolation for the betterment of my community spanning the peak of illness in October 2020 to now. I feel as though any social skills I had worked really hard to obtain prior to this pandemic, have all vanished. Unreachable. From my stutter from lack of speech, my palms sweating an obscene amount when I'm in public from stress. My ADHD being out of control makes having a simple conversation a nightmare. I can never tell when it's my turn to share, and when I finally feel safe to share a thought, I realize the conversation has moved on to another topic without me. I panic when people speak to me, always unsure of what to say. I haven't gone anywhere or done anything exciting in over a year at this point. I've lost the map to connecting with others in a sensible way. I'm hopeful I will find people similar to me through Fairhaven. Perhaps I'll write '**Seeking Friendship Ad**': communication occurs in **Feral Goblin** language. Otherwise known as a series of grunts, moans, and sound effect strung together with meaning. Apply locally to adopt a Goblin. Pros: Will bring shiny objects, and half eaten snacks to share.

Before I leave the chat, I will say not every piece of the pandemic was terrible. I did continue to spend from April of 2020 through September of 2020 travelling. Popping in and out of Washington state to check on my family, whenever I found myself over that invisible line, I had drawn down the center of the country. I got to see Yellowstone, glacier national park, the hot springs of Montana and of Idaho. I got to traverse the grassy plains of New Mexico, and bask in an oasis in deserts of Arizona. People weren't working, so picking up jobs doing landscape work from town to town was the easiest it's ever been. Gas was also the cheapest I'd ever seen in my life time across the country. Making a little bit of cash flow further than the typical. I got to spend time on the Locsaw and Wenatchee rivers laughing with people I hadn't seen in ages. I got to learn what matters to me. Form my intrinsic values. Re-evaluate what boundaries even mean to me, and implement them into my own life. My oldest dog will be 8 this year in April, she's gotten to poop on almost every state in the country before she passes away. Our bodies have grown too tired for this lifestyle together, but at least we got to share this experience.

The economy taking a huge nosedive? Surprisingly enough, worked out in my favor. I never would have considered coming back to school without it. My previous life career choice, jobs were asking the same starting rates as fry cooks in Seattle. Where before the pandemic, they were paying 20-25\$ an hour. The benefits outside of that were trash, but at least I could afford travel incurred costs for these positions, where as now; I couldn't. It made more financial sense for me to apply for FAFSA and hope for a full ride, with remaining cash flow to maintain my monthly bills. After close to two years of bum life, I would get that opportunity! I finally got the ability to attempt to reach my dreams. I'm so happy to get that chance.

The most truthful statement I think I can make is that this pandemic has had lots of ups and downs for a large amount of us. I firmly believe there won't be a "return to normal". The best we can hope for is the ability to adapt to a life that is similar to the ones we held pre-pandemic. With that I wish you luck reader, as you overcome your own challenges as a result of today's list of grievances. Thank you for sharing this space. Here's to tomorrow being a little bit better tomorrow when we wake than it is today.

## End of contributed text from Dom Bryan ##