



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

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Story contribution

I don't think I ever really realize when something big is happening around me, something that is bigger than myself. At least I didn't really think much of it when we got the text that classes were going online, in fact I was a little excited. I assumed this whole mess would be over by the end of the quarter or summer at the latest. Yet here I am almost two years later writing this still in the midst of the same pandemic that once cut my freshman year of college 4 months short. I still remember that feeling of the unknown stretching out before me, it started to set in as I packed my belongings out of the dorm room and into the car. I would continue to feel that restless uneasy feeling of not knowing and not being able to do anything as I scrolled through the daily headlines late at night, anxiously awaiting some piece of news or anything that made sense. Those were the early days, the day sprinkled with sourdough bread baking and then watching the show Tiger King at night. The days I hoped would pass more quickly so that I could get on with my life. I realize now looking back at this time that I was extremely fortunate in my circumstances. I feel a lot of gratitude for that time I spent, holed up inside chatting with my family, lamenting about the state of the world, and going on cold rainy walks coaxing the sun to peek out if only for a minute. I re-read my childhood favorite books with gusto, completely absorbed with the romance of another world and experimented with sewing and skateboarding, though I failed to master either.

For fear of trying to romanticize something of the past, especially a global pandemic that has caused so much loss, it would feel wrong to say that everyday was a cottage core fairy tale. I think that it felt like the world was ending some days, the fear of being jobless, the fear of going about everyday tasks, and the fear associated with feelings of isolation. In those moments I felt as if I was mourning, mourning what I would have been doing if not for this pandemic. Mourning what could have been.

Summer came, along with warm weather and outings. Yet in the midst of it all there were protests and screams for system change for justice for black lives. There is something to be said about how this pandemic creates a certain urgency in people. I saw this in the George Floyd protests as well as in the mutual aid projects that started popping up around the community in an effort to help out their neighbors. But yet again, this was and is a time of struggle and I don't want to forget that. If anything this pandemic has laid bare the inequalities and frankly the brokenness of our systems, whether that be healthcare, housing, poverty or policing. It has shown me just how codependent I am on my neighbors across land and sea, yet at the same time it has shown how divided we are willing to become in the name of our personal beliefs and freedoms.

After a summer that ended in heavy smoke and heavier hearts about the impending doom of climate change, I moved back to Bellingham, living for the first time completely independently in a tiny house with four friends and an old cat. Zoom meetings dominated my life as well as the daunting task of getting a job in the midst of a global pandemic. But slowly I was settling, our house was tiny and our kitchen even smaller. But we cooked lots of food, listened to lots of records and somehow still had time for online school. I think of these times fondly, because again the circumstances made for wonderful things to happen. I made connections I don't think I would have made if it were not for the social distancing and zoom meetings. While perhaps I was outwardly mourning this crazy moment in the world around me, inward I was marveling at the many different ways things there are to learn about others and all the different ways there are to laugh. I felt okay being tucked away from the bigger world in that moment, I being an introvert loved the prospect of curling up on the couch and talking with my roommates all night rather than going out, something I thought I ought to be doing or always imagined I would be doing at this stage in my life.



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Today things are a little different, I recently registered for classes for winter quarter and they are all set to be in person. I have a little more normalcy to my life, a steady job that is not virtual. Days on campus that are bustling with other students. It's been a little more challenging than I imagined transitioning back to everyday life, yet I am thankful for the ever changing years that lay out in front of me. Recently I lost all my pictures on my phone, ones I had been collecting for the past five years. In those lost photos, is an archive so to speak of my time in quarantine, my time living at home with my family, the small exertions I took in an effort to entertain myself and the many memories that essentially made up the past two years. Though initially I was saddened by this loss, I realize that now my covid experience relies heavily on my own memories and the relationships that I established during this time

End of contributed text from Seda Foley