

3/24/20

Collaboration Narrative

Draft 1

Quarantine start: 3/16

My experience since finding out classes would be online for the rest of the semester.

In the name of science and truth, I write this narrative to find out how my experience in this surreal and groundbreaking time in our history stacks up with the experiences and thoughts of others. I only offer truth and my own thoughts and opinions on the current situation. I only offer my account of these events and how my life has unfolded in their wake.

Honestly, my life hasn't changed all that much, I just wish I could still go skiing with lift access. As this piece unfolds, will there be any groundbreaking revelations of self and society? Probably not. Will it be mostly uneventful with way too much information about how often I self-medicate with substances and video games? Most definitely. My hope is that as the writing unfolds, it will act to relieve stress and at least lead to a minor revelation concerning our current status not just as citizens of the United States, but as global citizens and simply as people with loved ones and varying degrees of responsibility for others in these trying times.

First off, I live in a fairly secluded bubble. I'm single, I have no children, and I don't have to take care of my parents. My responsibilities for anyone but myself are limited, which helps in a crisis. Even before all this COVID craziness was going down, I didn't pay

attention to the news. If something big enough happened that may be of concern, it found its way to my attention either by word of mouth, through my friends from my hometown in our Discord channel, or by my dad calling me to talk about it. Even before the 2016 election, I wasn't into politics. It all seemed so far outside of my control, which made it unworthy of my time and attention. From my viewpoint politicians were crazy people. What kind of a personality would want that level of responsibility, scrutiny and all the headaches that came with it? The results of the 2016 election proved me right about politicians being crazy people and resulted in my being even less concerned with politics than ever before. Point being, I don't have any habits that lead to me being well-informed about what's going on in the world at any given time. I think that's why I like Montana so much. I feel like I can exist here in my own little bubble and feel removed from a lot of the bullshit that perpetrates the media and the lives of those living in big cities and the urban sprawls that surrounds their concrete-laden clusterfuck.

When news about Coronavirus first started picking up momentum, it was interesting being in a digital rhetoric class where we could talk about and monitor the situation as it evolved while keeping in mind rhetorical implications for all that we saw and heard concerning the soon-to-be pandemic. Following current events and news in this manner is not my forte, so it helped being in a classroom setting where I could engage with peers and ask questions to a professor who I knew would provide real (if not partially biased) information. In the days leading up to spring break, all of my professors addressed the possibility of going fully online for the rest of the semester, but nobody seemed to think it would happen as the virus had yet to hit Montana or several of the states surrounding us. Within a few days, on Friday the 13th when we were on the cusp of spring break, we got the

official word that we would indeed be finishing up the semester in an online format. At first, I was kind of excited. I like getting out and being active, but I also like sitting on the couch and doing nothing for extensive periods of time. Online classes coupled with a quarantine would enable me to do just that. Although relationships with family and friends are the most important thing in my life, If I had to pick a side, I would say I'm an introvert.

I didn't realize it until I was an adult, but throughout my life I've struggled with the ups and downs of depression which would often cause me to isolate myself in a similar manner to what we are experiencing now. At my low points I would stay inside, mostly alone, for weeks on end, drowning my feelings in weed, alcohol, and video games, all as a means of escaping reality. I would force myself to do physical activity and stay fit to help alleviate symptoms of depression and justify long bouts of sitting inside doing nothing alone. While my mental health is better now than it has been in the past, when I heard about online school and quarantine, I thought, "this will be great. I can get mega value out of my ski pass, stay home the rest of the time, and do schoolwork from the comfort of my pajama pants with my cat sleeping soundly by my side." I thought my sadboi past had prepared me with the patience and mental fortitude it takes to be stuck in a small three-bedroom apartment with my two roommates for weeks on end. Turns out I was right. As long as I have my cat, weed, booze and video games, along with a bedroom door that closes, I'm ace at this quarantine business.

As I write this, it's been eight days of what I would consider "quarantine". Since Spring break started, I've only been out of my apartment a handful of times. Sunday the 15th of March was the last day of operations at Big Sky. I got up early, busted up to the

mountain, and had an awesome full day of riding that only made me hungry for more and increasingly sad and bitter about the state of affairs that caused the early shutdown. Every time I rode a lift that day, it was with an out of state visitor who said the same thing. "We thought it would be okay here, I can't believe they're shutting down!" I would think to myself, "yeah, and it's all your fault." Everybody in a highly populated area had the same idea of escaping to the mountains in a low population area, so Big Sky, in my opinion, did the right thing by shutting down in a preventative measure instead of a reactionary one. I went to the grocery store that same night after getting back to Bozeman and bought about a week and half of groceries and beers. While some of the shelves at Albertsons had more bare space and toilet paper was non-existent, the relative normality of my experience buying groceries was somewhat of a comfort. Afterwards, I went home to fire up the video games and get ready to play my way through this crisis just as I had played my way through various stages of depression in the past.

Since my initial trip to the grocery store on the 15th, leading up to today, March 24th, I've only left the house one other time to go cross country skiing in Hyalite to get some exercise and fresh air. Besides that, my roommates and I have been cooking a lot of joint meals, exercising in our rooms, drinking beer in the daytime, and budgeting the devil's lettuce so as not to be left "un-high" and dry. We've also spent a good deal of time playing Call of Duty's new free online battle royale game together, which was released right at the same time mass lockdowns were being ordered in places like Ohio and New York.

I grew up in New Jersey and I still have a lot of family and friends on the East Coast. My parents are both in New Jersey, my sister is in Boston and my brother is in Chicago, all

densely populated zones with a much higher risk than Bozeman. I've been in constant contact with them, both to make sure they're doing okay and to alleviate boredom and hear a friendly familiar voice. One of my oldest friends from home lives in Manhattan and thinks he has Coronavirus, as he has been showing persistent symptoms for ten days or more. He currently doesn't have access to testing, so he doesn't know for sure. It's stressful for him both because he's worried about his own health as well as that of his aging parents who require a good deal of help around their house. His mother is in good health, but his father has Parkinson's disease which makes him susceptible to both the virus and the fear that's being spread through media when his mind isn't operating at full capacity due to the disease. He's afraid to make physical contact with them due to the uncertain nature of his own condition and spends a significant amount of time each day on the phone with his dad, trying to keep him calm. It's a tough situation and it breaks my heart, but we're staying in constant contact through Discord, a voice chat and media sharing app, and hoping for the best.

In summary, I spent my spring break staying inside, playing video games, feeding my already significant alcohol habit, making gratuitous jokes about coronavirus, sharing memes about coronavirus with real life friends in an online space and laughing often to keep baser notions of sadness about the state of the world at bay for as long as I can manage.

4/1/20

Well, it's a week later, while I've been thinking about this project and what to write each day. But I've had a hard time thinking of anything worthy to record as I've been living

this “groundhogs’ day” type of life where each day is the same. The only thing that’s really changed for me is that I feel some jokes I’ve made to make light of the situation early on are now in poor taste. Compared to many, I think I’m holding up well in a quarantine setting. Since last week I’ve left the house one time to go to the grocery store and buy cat litter. My roommates and I have adopted the practice of decontaminating anything that comes into the house from the outside world. One of the main effects of being stuck in the house all the time is that I’m falling into old habits where I stay up until 3 am and sleep until 10 or 11 am. Motivation for school in this setting is dwindling. I’m in 4 writing classes and my days are a constant barrage of posting for discussions on D2L, responding to classmates and responding to classmate responses. Over and over and over... I knew it wouldn’t be the same experience at all, but I’m really missing the face to face class meetings at this point.

I’m still talking to my friends and family around the country often, and I’m keeping tabs on my grandparents in Virginia more closely than usual. My friend in New York still thinks he’s infected but can’t get testing because he’s “young and healthy” and our healthcare system is beyond overwhelmed, especially in NYC. One of my roommates had a skype party with his whole family last night, they used some app to play board games or something as a group through the video chat. It looked like fun, but also had a tinge of desperation to it as I don’t think that’s something they would ever do otherwise, and it seemed from the outside that they were being overly cheerful to compensate for the situation we’re all in. Overall, I really can’t complain, I’m eating well, I’m healthy (for now), and I’m in good company with my roomies. My kitty loves having us around every second of every day and is in a state of constant cuddliness. I’m still drinking a lot to help pass time. Since this started, I’ve probably spent close to equal amounts of money on booze and food,

which is bad if you ask me. I rationalize it by telling myself booze is expensive and I've been buying cheap bulk foods for the most part.

4/7/20

One of my roommates and I shaved "quarantine (mutton) chops". It's like an inverse mohawk for your beard. My mom's half-brother in Pennsylvania tested positive for Coronavirus, I don't really know any details about how/if he's getting treatment because I'm scared to know. Whatever will happen will happen regardless of what I know, is it selfish to try and save myself the stress of worry by choosing to be ignorant to the details? We had to throw out the mattress to our futon because my cats been pissing on it. We saw him do it and when we pulled off the cover the thing was soaked through from several applications by Big Handsome. It's amazing it never smelled or showed wet or anything before. Now we're effectively down a couch in the living room while we're all stuck inside. I got some kitty pheromones at the pet store that are supposed to help. We think he's doing it because we have newish neighbor's underneath us with at least 2 Maine Coons that sit in the window, my cat goes outside and sees them, then comes back and tries to claim us by peeing on our stuff. Kind of a sweet sentiment, if it weren't for the ammonia nasty stank of cat urine ruining our "free from Craigslist" futon. Focusing of school remains difficult some days, borders on impossible others, then I'll have a day of clear headedness where I get a bunch of stuff done before slipping back into whatever funk this whole situation has brewed up in my psyche.

My aunt and uncle in Hungry Horse run a vacation home rental, which is empty for the foreseeable future and they invited us to come up and stay there for a bit while we wait

this thing out. It's beautiful in the Flathead and the VRBO property is way nicer than our place, so once we get fed up enough, we'll jet up there without stopping and do quarantine Hungry Horse style! The only downside is Glacier will be closed, but there's plenty of good views and social distance friendly hikes around there regardless. I've been reading about how others are cutting out screen time and greatly benefitting from it. I have made no steps to do this yet, but I would like to, and I think my goal for when we go to Hungry Horse is to limit screen time and spend more time just **BEING**. Walking, reading, exercising, taking naps, drawing, puzzles, woodwork, cornhole and projects around the house are all fair game for filling my time there, aside from school of course...

4/20/20

Haven't revisited this piece for almost a few weeks now, things got dark for a little bit. I'm going to keep this entry short and sweet. The past few weeks were the most difficult so far. Plagued by anxiety out the fucking ying-yang and existential dread, negative emotions ruled my life for a few days and my schoolwork suffered substantially as a result. I thought I was doing quite well handling everything, then suddenly, I wasn't. I hit a point a few days back where I felt completely fried from all the stress and luckily was able to let some go. Yesterday myself and one of my roommates drove up to my aunt and uncles place near Glacier to stay at the BnB (technically a VRBO now). I've been elated literally since I got here. The change feels surreal after being stuck in a tiny apartment with two other people for so long. The cat came with, traveled very well, and is extremely happy in this new, larger environment. I already have had considerably less screen time since getting

here and have spent time outside playing lacrosse, cornhole and doing yard work in the sun. My roommate and I feel much better being here, we finally have some space and an unreal view of the Apgar mountain range and the Middle Fork of the Flathead River off the back deck to soothe our souls. I've spent a lot of time here over the years and it feels like home. In this new headspace that was waiting for me here, I feel much better about getting back into school and being able to focus on something other than the depression along with feelings of anxiety, guilt, and dread. Today is a special date, I plan to take it for myself before getting back to business tomorrow. This dude abides.

This dude abides

For sun and snow and summers glow

I wait patiently down below

Intangible unfettered dread

Inspired by the undesirable

Reaches out to say goodbye

Gazing taking it all in stride

For one more day this dude abides

5/6/20

This will be my final entry. I got back to the Bozeman a few days ago to finish projects and finals, and I'm just happy I was able to get away for a while. I spent my time in

Hungry Horse very well, I hiked and snowboarded, exercised, stayed away from screens for the most part, and had a really nice time seeing a few old friends who had also been self-quarantined and hanging out with my Aunt and Uncle. The trip was just the reset I needed, now there's just a few more days of school before I'm done for the semester and a new batch of challenges are waiting to be faced. Adapting to quarantine as the weather gets nice and finding a summer job may prove difficult, but these are challenges I'm ready and willing to face.