

COVID-19: A Single Story

Artist Statement:

For this project, I wanted to share with future humans or present humans how pandemics or global tragedies impact individuals differently. I am a cis-gendered, low-income, white woman in her late twenties. My particular experience was marked by isolation, a lack of internet access, vulnerable parents, financial crises, questions of access to healthcare, and witnessing how MSU, as well as different professors handled the outbreak and the transition to online classes. In my experience, COVID-19 highlighted the humanitarianism in the professors of my disciplines (English Writing, English Literature, and Women and Gender Studies). It also revealed to me the inflexible and unmoving approach of those professors outside of my department in relation to my dealings with math professors, who only made mine and other student's lives more difficult during an already challenging period. I learned the value of physical embodiment; I am a human who needs other humans to succeed. I've known that for a while now, but social distancing reminded me of the importance of reaching out—to those humans who I love and who love me back, even if I can't embrace them in real time.

March 13, 2020 - Kung Pao Chicken

Today we all found out that MSU is going online for the rest of the semester. I find this irritating because I've taken online classes before, and what did I learn you may ask? I learned that my academic career should be one that is in person. I took a semester of classes online in 2011, and I failed *all of them*. As a student who usually gets A's, that semester of failure was devastating to my ego, mental health, and self-worth. Yes, I was 21-ish then. Yes, I had just begun a downward spiral of drinking and bartending (which was basically getting paid to party). Yes, I was working 40+ hours a week and trying to go to school full time. In hindsight, I can't entirely blame the "online" part of my life as the *ONLY* reason that I failed school that semester, but it left a sour taste in my mouth. It's kind of like when you vomit a certain kind of food, and then you never want to eat it again. Like, when I was 18 my boss at this drugstore I worked at would buy us Chinese food on Sundays. One fateful Sunday, I ordered Kung Pao chicken, and then after work I decided to run 3.5 miles. After the run, I vomited my guts out at the trailhead. I will never eat Kung Pao chicken again. Similarly, after that semester of failure, I decided to never again digest online classes. So that's how I feel about online classes, but once again, the world doesn't revolve around me. And sometimes, I have to remind myself that.

March 16, 2020 - American Can Be Such a Bitch When You're Poor

I spent the weekend in my bed, sleeping a lot. Probably too much, like a depressed "I give up" kind of sleep where you decide Netflix is life and Netflix is the only thing that brings you happiness. My plan for spring break was to find a new job. I've been working at the MSU Writing Center for three semesters now and transitioning from service work, which pays bills to tutoring, which pays nothing, has been difficult. The thing is when I work at bars and restaurants, I succumb to service industry culture. If you haven't worked in service industry jobs, I'll let you know that the money is fast and fast money transforms me into the fasted woman you'll ever meet. Unfortunately/Fortunately I've always been more of a "yes" person than a "no" person. So when people offer me stuff or things that resemble sex, drugs, and rock n' roll, I usually say, "yes, please, sir. Yes, please." Because of these habits I've created,

the combination of service work and school weren't really serving my academic success, so I decided to find a job that would center me on campus. The Writing Center functions as a grounding job for me, but when you go from making around \$25/hr to \$12/hr, life becomes a different flavor of difficult.

So, I decided after a year and a half that although I was getting A's and slaying school, I was going to have to go back to service work because my credit cards bills were just becoming atrocious and embarrassing. THEN THE COVID HIT! Prior to COVID I had just played so many mental games with myself surrounding this decision. I know it doesn't seem like that big of a deal, but it was for me. Credit card debt is one those things that haunts you and just reminds you that you'll always be poor. Like, when you're making minimum payments, not because you're spending your money elsewhere, but because you're only getting paid enough to make minimum monthly payments—life turns kind of grey. Especially, when your minimum payments are less than the interest you acquire each month. America can be such a bitch when you're poor.

April 6, 2020 - On This Episode of My Disaster Life

Today is day 15 of my solo mission. I have been away from the internet because my parents are dinosaurs who live in Alaska. They are very magical humans, but technology is their enemy. I have been with them getting them prepared for the New World to come. Technology has become my enemy for many days as well.

Now that I have arrived back in Bozeman, things are strange. Yesterday I went to Town n' Country. I was in the produce section because I love fruits and vegetables, but my good time was cut short by a mean lady. One lady was next to the carrots, the other old lady also had her eye on those delectable carrots. Both were camouflaged in masks and gloves, but one was not settling for company. The old lady screamed at the more middle aged lady and said, "YOU ARE NOT SIX FEET AWAY FROM ME!" Everyone stared at them. Then the guy who works there who is bald and white and nice smiled at me with a smile that said, "Wow, those old ladies be cray."

So that happened.

Since I've been back, I've been at war with the internet. I had to move because I was on a lease with my friends.....Well actually I wasn't on the lease, so that was my first problem. My friend got a job in New Mexico, which is exciting for her and kind of made me resentful. You know when you're stuck in your own pile of poppycock and someone else's good news makes you want to watch them bleed out slowly? That's where my head was. Anyways, she tells me her good news, which becomes my bad news. My then roommate will be out of the house by June first, which means I have to get the hell out of there too. If you haven't noticed, houses in Bozeman are expensive and I work at MSU. That means I don't make enough money to survive any sort of decent life. I just rack up credit card debt and pretend like it's free money and that everything's okay. Then I applied for a loan and got a loan, so I could put down first and last month's rent plus a deposit plus another deposit for my sweet kitty named Lucifer. His name is ironic; he's an angel, don't let anyone tell you different!

The next couple of days I moved all my things from one house to another house with help from my new roommate who I will call, Jesus. Jesus has many siblings and they all live in town, so they were GREAT GREAT GREAT humans who were super helpful and helped me move. It took about three days to get moved, but I'm very happy with my new house and cat tower. BUT BUT BUT Spectrum doesn't allow you to just go and simply pick up internet anymore. THANKS COVID. *No, that would be too easy.* So I'm

waiting for my internet in the mail, and I've been waiting since last week. Jesus called them and just texted me "I guess they've been real busy. [The Internet] is coming from Texas and should be here by 8pm tomorrow."

In conclusion, I haven't had the internet for 2 1/2 weeks. I have to do homework at my partner's house who lives with three boys who are both gamers and worshippers of the rap music. They have all been laid off, so they're always home blasting that rap music or gaming. Either I can't study because of the rap music or I can't study because the internet is overloaded with boys playing games with each other.

April 7, 2020 - Surviving, not Thriving

The radio in my car is always on YPR, but other than that I try to stay away from the news because my mental health can't take it. I suffer from what doctors call "manic depression with acute anxiety" so I'm attempting to kick mental health's ass by avoiding violent boredom. I'm also trying to walk everywhere because my days are so boring and long, and driving a car to and from stores makes the things I can do go by so much faster. Then, I'm left with so little to do and no internet—that's the real enemy, boredom. I can't even donate the things I wanted to donate to the thrift store when I moved. Then, I had that extra guilt of adding to the surplus of landfill instead of the grateful hands of Bozeman Americans. Luckily, I have a huge dumpster at my new apartment, therefore I didn't have to keep garbage bags (like 13) full of junk in my house, but I also just killed the environment. RIP nutrient rich soil. There's no winning with COVID.

I made a lot of delicious guacamole yesterday. I played catch with my human for many hours and his dog. That was fun and it was outside fun, so extra extra good fun. I've transitioned through a stage of hopeless depression into a tearful, go-getting phase. That's where I'm at today. I'm doing my homework in between bouts of rap music. Right now it's quiet and so nice. I am grateful for no sounds of men—just the sound of young men's voices makes me resentful. You would feel the same if you were trapped in a house with so many men. So many many men. So much trap music.

April 17, 2020 - Roommates and Prison

So apparently my new roommate's dad is in prison - the one near Deerlodge. But she's worried about him because the prisons are overrun with Corona, and we all know that prison systems have the worst health care systems in America and that American hegemony, in general, gives zero fucks about felons. Apparently, they were going to release the non-violent offenders (which would include my roommate's father). At least the guards separated the non-violent offenders from the violent offenders, and informed them they were going to be released; however, then they made updates to the terms of release; inmates had to have x many years left in order to qualify for early release.

Because yes, it makes sense for those individuals who sold weed or were found guilty of white collar crimes to slowly die in an overcrowded facility, right? And we all know how Montana is primarily white, right? So apparently the Montana prison serves as a place to put prisoners from out of state that are overflowing. So the most colorful place in Montana is our prison systems. I just think that's fucked up, no matter how you slice it.

April 21, 2020 - Maybe, Maybe Not

For me I'm just trying to keep moving. Stillness is my enemy at this point. I think stillness has always been my enemy, but it has become more energetically evil as I've gotten older. Sometimes I think I lack imagination entirely. I think you have to have more hope than I possess to imagine. Instead, I'm always contemplating, comparing and contrasting, which is a gross habit, a "grass is greener" habit/attitude that I try to keep at bay. However, I do imagine what the world could be without predator-prey dynamics. I want to spend my life fighting for a better, more inclusive world (I know this sounds very cheesy, but I'm desperate for a different reality); I don't know how to approach that fight yet. So I'll just keep moving, absorbing, experimenting.....

My mom thinks I'm a warrior, which is one of the many lovely things mother's should say to their daughters when they need to hear it. I'm a human who is constantly depressed, reflecting on the points in my life where I was a teenager addicted to heroin or pissing the bed because I was so drunk or getting raped because I was so drunk. But I think my stories and my life provide me with reasons to fight. I wish women didn't have to experience domination by men, but rape is such a naturalized part of our global hierarchy. It's gross and I hate it.

On the upside, the sun has been really helpful, kind of depressing because I have to spend so much time inside doing school. However, for the few hours I get to be outside, nothing is better. I'm excited to be done with school, but the end of school also signals getting another job because my time at The Writing Center is seasonal. I'm just hoping to get a job—that jobs are available. I want to garden or farm or landscape. Although these jobs don't pay well, they maintain my sanity and my sanity is valuable because when I become insane, I really lose it. I'm like an energetic presentation of Eeyore. I feel like only my very close friends know the sloppiness of my interiority (or anyone who went to bars in downtown Bozeman from 2011-2016). But I just have gnarly genetic make-up. My relatives have a habit of dying young because we live pretty hard. I'm trying to live my life differently, but only time will tell.

April 22, 2020 - Poorness, Dying, Health Insurance: Different Flavors of My Particular Hellscape

I'm just going to apologize for doing nothing on time, to Kirk (my professors who will be reading this) and to the rest of you, but my life is chaos, it's basically fluctuating between "fuck, I'm so behind" to "I could beat level 768 on Fishdom and continue to earn beauty stars to unlock the next aquarium" to "I shouldn't actively feed my depression by staying inside and horizontal all day" to "I hate my math teacher. I feel like she's a demon from hell who was put on this planet to make my life more difficult. Don't cry. Don't cry." As of today, my life seems more like a hellcape than anything else. Yes, I am being dramatic, but I just got done doing 3 hours of math where I practically got nothing done because we don't have a textbook (virtual or physical) and our professor just sends us collections of YouTube videos or nothing at all as we descend into the fiery depths of remedial math.

My view of the future is mostly frightened with a dash of anxiety and a splash of that dirt-poor lifestyle. I think COVID has highlighted the issues within our society to whole new proportions. Being poor always sucks, but I think it's worse when your poorness becomes a part of every single action you can and cannot take. After so long, it seems like poorness defines who you are entirely, and it's really easy to fixate on. Like, poorness dictates everything, but listening to my friend's friend's stories just slammed that reality back into my periphery. She got COVID or assumed she did. She had between a 100-105 temperature for over 4 days so she called a doctor. They told her to go to the ER. When she got there, they said they couldn't test her for 4 days, and she needed to stay at the hospital over the

weekend. She asked them how much that would cost, and they told her that just talking to them, like the conversation that they were currently having, which was about a 10-minute conversation, was already going to cost her \$300. So she left and is just waiting out the virus in her house by herself. She's my roommate's best friend, and you could have a million opinions about her actions, but I know I would do the exact same.

So today, I am so grateful that I'm not sick, but if I was sick, I wouldn't go to a hospital because I don't think that I would ever be able to financially recover for those bills. And I think I'd rather die from sickness than allow my poorness to slowly defeat me over a lifetime. One is a quick and depressing death, and the other is a never ending spiral of depression, which puts hope on a treadmill, dangling it in front of you as if you're dog, but you're not a dog; you're a human with a human brain that allows you to feel shame about getting anxiety about your anxiety because of the realness of your depression. That treadmill promises that repetitious running will change you, but you really never get anywhere and know that nothing will change even as you ascend the treadmill, but you keep trying regardless of facts and statistics that note your zero percent chance of changing your economic status, which ultimately authorizes your access or inaccessibility to basically everything in America. I think, similarly, to many other points in our history, poor people will just die. Like, have you read the stories about the NY subway stations? They're still running and they're basically still as full as they have always been and they're primarily full of black and brown bodies who have to work to survive. Crowded subways are definitely serving as breeding grounds for this virus. Have you seen those photos of all the stacked dead bodies covered up in NY? It's one of those catastrophically horrible symptoms of being poor in a capitalistic system during a pandemic: those who weren't thriving before COVID, may not survive after, physically, economically, emotionally, and/or mentally.

I just don't want to talk or think about it, so most of my days I'm trying to focus on anything but what my socio-economic status means to my well-being and future because when I do, I just kind of drown in hopelessness. I tried to file for unemployment last night, but I did something wrong and got locked out of my account, so now I need to call them in order to get my account unlocked in order to proceed. For now, my future just looks like finishing up school for this semester. I have about 40 pages left to write. It just wasn't a great semester for taking 19 credits, not even a little bit. And then having to be internet-free for multiple weeks because my parents are old and haggard and Alaskan and isolated AF.

So today, I'm grateful for Costco. It's so sterile in there, and I feel like Costco workers aren't that nice. They just do their job efficiently and don't fuck around. I appreciate that lack of bullshit and the practice of realness within what appears to be their valued practices: practicality, efficiency, and cleanliness. So maybe in the not so distant future I'll work at Costco. I just need health insurance. I haven't had health insurance in years because I really only need dental and optical, and no fiscal insurance plan actually covers those things. I have pity for both my teeth and my eyes.

Sorry for that getting really depressing.

April 27, 2020 - Louisiana and Madison

I talked to my sister today. She lives in Fort Polk, Louisiana, which is an army base. Anyways, I am going to oversimplify her complex situation for you all. When my sister, Madison, was 22 (she is now 31), she decided to have a baby. Even more intelligently, she decided to have a planned pregnancy with

a heroin addict named Pete. Getting pregnant was easy, but the stopping heroine part proved tough for her baby daddy. Anyways lots of messiness and years later, my sister is married to a soldier, Caleb, and living in LA and her heroine baby daddy is now clean and sober, living in AK. This summer her baby, my nephew Sterling, was supposed to spend the summer with Pete; however, my sister lives on a military base, so that's when everything gets sticky. So military humans are in full quarantine, which means their spouses/families are too. Madison was planning on flying Sterling to AK, spending some time in Juneau with my parents and then flying back. But now, she's not allowed to leave base. She's not allowed to cross state lines, and if she does, Caleb (her now husband) will get in military trouble. I don't know what exactly happens but basically, Madison will bring shame upon her family Mulan-style. She will also be fined and be forced to purchase herself a hotel for two weeks (self-quarantine) out of pocket upon arrival back to LA. Anyways, financial and emotional shame would result if my sister was to break the rules.

I haven't looked up the factual nature of the things that come out of my sister's mouth, but she told me that New Orleans is comparable to NY city. She told me "they're running out of places to throw the dead bodies." Because it's so bad in LA, Texas has shut its borders down to individuals driving through or who are from LA.

April 28, 2020: D-Day

To past Hannah:

You will be beaten this semester, and it won't be by who you would think. You would have never guessed the complexity of defeat chomping at your hope and will as standard deviations, normal distributions, and histograms argue against your intelligence and decency. This semester you will go into Jabs once more, but you won't remember it for the sparkly lights, flashing numbers, and swirling stock prices or the collection of young men dressed up like their daddies. You won't once again think, "Wow, this place is like *Wolf of Wall Street*—so much better than Wilson." Oh no, you will find yourself sitting in Jabs longing for the company of Wilson—on sunny Saturday mornings by yourself on too many occasions with only a janitor who hands you sanitation bottles. He instructs you to clean the keyboard and the computer before your departure. He then offers you hand sanitizer that is 94% Ethanol. And no, it is not because he knows about your European shower habits. It turns out that your rugged filth has nothing to do with his suggestions. But,

something is coming. Toilet paper will not run out (as you predicted). You will still have access to all the vegetables you want, but beware of employment.

Cautiously,
Future Hannah

April 29, 2020 - Kicking Math's Ass

Today I am doing so much better! I only have 3 math assignments left and that's really my biggest accomplishment during all of this chaos. I went on a run this morning. I drank the rest of my delicious bone broth. I made carrot, celery, apple juice. More than anything, math and financial issues have been defeating me over this time period. My math class is just a mess. It's stupid. My professor doesn't know what the fuck she's doing. I basically spend my days searching YouTube videos to teach myself math. It has been the most unreasonable class that I have ever participated in. I can't remember if I've already talked about it on here or not, but I've talked about it enough for me.

I've also just always been a poor person; however, I used to make so much more money than I do now working at The Writing Center. Bartending and serving money maintain different qualities of life than working at MSU. I just haven't done a great job transitioning from one financial mindset to another. I use my credit cards too much, and my depression often leaves me exhausted, sleeping in my bed, and ordering Cafe Courier because making food is too far out of my reach. Actually COVID was kind of good for me. I stopped using my credit cards, and I'm only spending money that I have. I think having to show up for my parents and taking care of them was beneficial to my mental health. The no-internet thing was kind of magical—frightening in relation to passing school, but it was so nice to just hang around my parents, protecting them from the germs of others and just giggling with my melodramatic mother. I'm wayyyyyyy better at showing up for other people than I am at showing up for myself. COVID hit a reset button in me, which I was desperate for. Although math almost beat me, I've had other professors who have been profoundly kind and generous, which sometimes a sister needs—just some authentic kindness when I feel like I'm on the verge of breaking.

May 1, 2020 - Meh, Bleh, Whatever

Today will be my last entry. I've been going over to my friend Amy's house to tutor her over the course of this virus. I was there right before this. I've spent so much time with her, like 3 days a week for at least an hour and a half crafting her essay with her. It is exhausting, but I find joy in helping her. She's great, but has just been out of school for awhile and school takes practice. I help her find her words. Moving forward, I have this assignment for Kirk. Linda gave me an extension, Brooke gave me an extension and I'm almost done with math: 2 more homeworks, 2 more worksheets, 1 more review sheet, and a final. I have until the 4th to do the work and then until Friday at noon to complete my final. I can at least see an end and that end doesn't kill me.

Today I am grateful for my apartment and bone broth. I make better bone broth than any other human. My humans can attest to that as fact. I love my roommate who is a great human. My cat is adorable. Money remains frightening, but I have a great support system, so I'll figure it out. After next week, I'll start applying for jobs. There's this place called Valley of the Flowers (I think that's what it's called), but it's like this gardening/landscaping company that is governed by women. I want to work there. I also need to fill out my graduation paperwork. I still have tons to do every day, but I'm longer drowning.

Thanks for listening,
XOXO Gossip Girl