

The Next Chapter

Library collects COVID stories for future generations

How will you remember the COVID-19 era?

Betsy Kluck-Keil posted a joke of the day in the front yard of her Crown Hill home to entertain her neighbors.

Ruth Quinet, inspired by a pre-COVID Library rental of “American Gigolo,” watched nearly every Richard Gere film—and reviewed them each.

These memories and more will be kept for generations to come in the Library’s Special Collections, as staff collect submissions from the public on their musings about the coronavirus and more.

It’s a novel project for the Special Collections team, which usually fixes its lens on the past.

“This is really a first in our Library’s collection work where community members are contributing



A woman and child pose in North Beacon Hill with a sign that reads “Take Care of Yourself” in the native language of Lushootseed in this photo archived in the Library’s COVID Collection. The sign was created by Hailey Tayathy, a Quileute drag queen and artist. (The Seattle Public Library)

materials in real time,” says Jade D’Addario, digital projects librarian.

So far, the Library has collected more than 150 submissions from 34 people—and they’re already available online for people to see.

The materials range from written stories to photos to poetry to artwork. They not only describe life in quarantine, but also other events that have characterized 2020, such as protests supporting Black Lives Matter.

What has surprised D’Addario the most is the sheer diversity of the submissions, from a West Seattle street musician’s narrative to a woman’s story about being medically induced into a coma before the pandemic had spread to Seattle—and waking up a month later right in the middle of it.



A woman stands masked inside a downtown Seattle business June 25, 2020. This photo, taken by Ken Allison, was archived in the COVID Collection. (The Seattle Public Library)

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The aim of the collection, D’Addario says, is to give future generations personal stories and a glimpse of what people’s lives were like in 2020 and what they were feeling at a time when so many monumental events were converging.

“Hopefully the collection will be able to provide a variety of viewpoints that aren’t just a formal history told 10, 20, 30 years after the fact,” she says.

You can submit your own contributions at spl.org/CovidCollection. Peruse the collection yourself at spl.org/CovidStories ■

“This is a first in our Library’s collection work where community members are contributing materials in real time.”

- JADE D’ADDARIO, DIGITAL PROJECTS LIBRARIAN

Two men outside a gated entry in downtown Seattle, June 4, 2020, taken by Ken Allison and archived in the COVID Collection. (The Seattle Public Library)





“I receive so much support in my life to feel independent and capable and I just wanted to provide that as a library service.”

- CLEO BROOKS, SUPERVISING LIBRARIAN OF LEAP

Cleo Brooks, supervising librarian of the Library Equal Access Program, will retire next year after 30 years in her position. She is a well-known champion of Library access for people with disabilities. (The Seattle Public Library)

LEAP head begins new chapter after 30 years of service

Cleo Brooks is such a fixture at the Library that even Camille Jassny’s guide dog knows where to find her office at Central Library.

Brooks has headed LEAP—the Library Equal Access Program—for 30 years. Next year, she will retire from her decades of service as the Library’s ambassador for patrons with disabilities.

“She’s just so caring and so warm,” says Jassny, who founded the Low-Vision Book Group with Brooks in 2006. “I’ve never met anybody quite like her.”

Brooks maintains a lifelong connection to The Seattle Public Library. Having grown up in Bellevue, her mother, then a science teacher, would take her and her siblings to story time at the Central Library and check out books and 8mm films.

Since starting her job at the Library in 1990—the year the Americans With Disabilities Act was passed by Congress—she has overseen LEAP nearly from its

inception to what it has become today—a hub of resources and technology that help people of all abilities access Library materials or even just use the computer.

That technology has changed quite a bit in 30 years. She recalls a man older than 60 with visual impairments who came to the Library with his 85-year-old mother so she could read him the materials. When the Library offered its first reading machine in 1991, the man could enter the Library and use it himself.

“Now I feel like an adult, like I’m part of the world,” Brooks recalls him saying.

But perhaps what’s changed more, Brooks says, is the culture of acceptance and advocacy for people with disabilities, and their increased sense of independence. She’s had patrons use the assistive technology at the LEAP Lab to find professional work and pursue higher education thanks to Library resources.

“I receive so much support in my life to feel independent and capable and I just wanted to provide that as a library service,” she says.

She’s known to work tirelessly to support her patrons, using her fluency in American Sign Language to talk to patrons with hearing loss and providing access for people using wheelchairs.

“She’s willing to go as far as she can to meet the many needs that our patrons have,” says C.J. Glenn, a library associate who supports Brooks in her capacity as LEAP supervisor and ADA coordinator. “Seeing how deftly Cleo met those patrons’ needs was inspiring to me and taught me a lot about my own role to help people.”

Jassny says that even after the Low-Vision Book Group meets, Brooks helps each member find the transit they need or has walked them across the street in a human chain to the soup café for a post-meeting lunch.

“She’s gone beyond the call of duty,” Jassny says. “She has a heart of gold.”

Dan and Dave Ortner, two brothers who are now the facilitators of the Low-Vision Book Group, say they've missed Brooks during the Library closures and will miss her presence in the Library after her retirement.

"She's just the sweetest, nicest person and she's always available to help," Dan Ortner says.

Her work has even inspired the Ortner brothers and Jassny to advocate for the Library on matters such as Levy renewal and City budget funding.

"She's been a wonderful asset to the Library—and an advocate for LEAP programs," Dan Ortner says.

Meanwhile, she remains busy adapting services to the COVID era, accommodating people seeking to attend remote events. She also continues to develop Sensory Story Time, a Foundation-supported program that started before COVID closures to include children with autism.

Her secret for nurturing the kindness and perseverance she's known for? She recalls a simple, universal adage her family instilled in her throughout her life.

"Just remember to be kind and remember to treat people the way you would like to be treated," she says. ■

Learn more about LEAP and its services at spl.org/LEAP



Foundation celebrates 40 years

There's so much to be proud of these past decades, but we want to use this occasion to thank critically important members of our team: You, our donors and volunteers. Because of you, the Foundation was able to support the Library with more than \$200 million in support since 1980, building robust collections and sponsoring thousands of free programs for our entire community to enjoy. Together, we've bolstered the Library through economic downturns and responded to societal needs that pushed us to more equitably serve our city. We are so grateful for our Library family.

If you value your Library and the vibrant community we've created together, donate \$40 for our 40th anniversary at give.supportspl.org/donate

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Why I give: Sara Miller

Sara Miller’s home library—the NewHolly Branch—may be closed for now, but she and her family are using the Library as much as ever.

She and her 7-year-old daughter, Hazel, check out e-books using the Libby app and have used the Curbside Services at the Rainier Beach Branch.

“It’s amazing,” says Sara, a social worker at Casey Family Programs. “We’ve been really happy with the Library.”

Sara also, with the encouragement of a friend, participated in Summer Book Bingo, reading about 25 books between July and September. Hazel completed the kids’ version.

“It definitely made me stretch and I discovered some really cool authors,” says Sara, who has also explored new titles using the “Your Next 5 Books” service.

“I really want her to grow up with a critical mind.”

- SARA MILLER, DONOR

Donor Sara Miller and her 7-year-old daughter, Hazel, show their love of the Library outside their home branch at NewHolly. (Photo courtesy Sara Miller)



For these reasons and more, Sara has become a Page Turner for The Seattle Public Library Foundation, giving a designated amount every month to maintain a continuous contribution to the Library her family relies on. She has also joined the Legacy Society, designating the Foundation as a beneficiary in her will.

“This is a place that most folks can access and it’s a public service that we definitely love supporting,” Sara says.

Both Sara and her husband grew up going to the library and they’ve come to find a sense of community at the NewHolly Branch, running into neighbors there and getting to know Library staff.

With NewHolly temporarily closed for COVID-19 safety measures, she has since explored the greater world of e-books and has found an emotional lifeline through reading.

“I’m so thankful to be doing a lot of reading now, especially in these times when things are so stressful,” Sara says.

Sara and her husband have passed that passion on to Hazel, who will sometimes fall asleep amid a pile of books.

Hazel enjoys the “Ordinary People Change the World” series of books by Brad Meltzer and has recently read about strong women such as Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Malala Yousafzai.

“I really want her to grow up with a critical mind,” Sara says.

Reading is something that not only the family can enjoy together—but that they can also share with their entire community.

“The Library is part of our community and there are so many services and so many resources out there that are hard for folks to access,” Sara says. “But the Library (has) a lot of locations and even during COVID, they’re working really hard to ensure they’re able to reach the community.” ■

To become a Page Turner yourself, visit give.supportspl.org/pageturner. To learn more about joining the Legacy Society, contact Kara McDonald, director of major and planned gifts, at kara@supportspl.org or 206-413-7177.



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