SWAA President’s Message

April 2020

Greetings to the SWAA Community from my couch in Albuquerque! It is a really beautiful spring day.

Thank you to Barbra Erickson for pulling this newsletter together (as always!).

It has become trite for us to say that these are challenging times, so I won’t say it. But we can’t ignore the current situation either. So the other day when Barbra reminded me that I needed to write this letter for the newsletter, it occurred to me that this year’s cancelled SWAA conference is a really interesting augury for what is happening with the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and economic disruption caused by the need for social distancing, and the COVID response efforts in a couple of ways.

First, is the unfortunate irony that the theme for the conference was to be “Community, Culture & Well-being.”

Certainly more than apropos for this particular moment. I will say more about this in a minute!

Second, is that the Keynote Speaker was to be Dr. Emily Mendenhall who was going to be speaking about her work using a “syndemic” lens to “rethink” diabetes. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing death and disruption of historic proportions that make our heads spin, but if we use a syndemic framework, we can similarly “rethink” COVID-19. The viciousness with which the virus is winding its way through homes, communities, states, and countries is made clear every time we watch the news or obsessively reopen our state health department webpages to see statistics about the number of positive cases and deaths. But already, we have reports documenting the ways that the impact of COVID-19, like diabetes, is following fault lines created by oppression, historical trauma, and poverty. Mendenhall’s complex and holistic analysis of diabetes offers timely insights for rethinking, disentangling, and making sense of the social and structural nexus undergirding diabetes health disparities, but also for making sense of the chaos and death we are witnessing across the globe.

And third (and notably more cheerful), we are witnessing amazing enactments of “community” and the promotion of “well-being” amidst the COVID-19 pandemic rubble. Community members and state and local stakeholders are coming together to try and make sure that everyone’s needs are taken care of. I work in the Department of Family and Community Medicine (FCM) at the University of New Mexico and I don’t teach, I do research on health equity and health disparities issues—and we certainly have plenty to focus on in New Mexico. From my vantage point, I am positioned to see things that might be unique for many in anthropology. FCM is a large department with about 70 faculty—the vast, vast majority of whom are family physicians who work at UNM clinics both on and off campus, the UNM hospital, and specialty programs. They serve as “attending” physicians training medical residents and medical students in clinical settings, and they teach in the UNM School of Medicine. So as a member of the faculty in FCM, I attend faculty meetings and receive emails that tend to be primarily clinical in nature.

This is always interesting in a weird way because our Department is actually an amazing group of incredibly committed doctors. I am constantly awed, humbled, and impressed by the work that they do on a regular basis and how much they care about their patients. But right now I am in the loop for emails and meetings about the COVID response. One colleague is managing the entire COVID medical response for the homeless population...
in all of Albuquerque, including multiple shelters that house 400+ people a night. My boss (whose brother died of COVID a week ago in NYC) is leading a COVID taskforce to coordinate the COVID response for tribal nations and pueblos in New Mexico—which have been hit very hard by the virus. All of the individuals employed at UNM who have clinical training have been notified that they are being put on a tiered list to provide clinical care in some form or another. They are being deployed to free up others who need to work directly with COVID-positive patients. I am on a “huddle” call every morning with community health workers (CHWs) and case managers who work with low-income clients. They make us aware of the novel struggles that people are now facing.

One of the insights that was discussed this morning was that low-income workers have become a COVID response workforce. White collar professionals are hidden away in their homes working remotely from their devices. It is now people who work in grocery stores, restaurants, delivery services, and construction who are the ones keeping everything afloat for the rest of us. This puts them at risk for falling ill with the virus. But many of them—as so aptly identified in Dr. Mendenhall’s work—have health issues such as diabetes or high blood pressure or just high levels of stress that put them at increased risk of “poor health outcomes” from COVID if they do become ill—which should be read to say “being hospitalized or dying.” But it is also clear that there are amazing stories of people coming together to work at The Storehouse—New Mexico’s largest food pantry, or to deliver food to isolated seniors who are fragile or who do not have transportation. So it is important that we not just focus on disparities and negative things. Acts of kindness and enactment of community contributes to well-being for all of us.

We are hoping that you will be able to join us next year in Albuquerque for the rescheduled SWAA conference. The theme will still be Community, Culture and Well-being, and we imagine that you won’t have any difficulty finding something to present about. In fact, we anticipate that you will all have so much to say, that we will have to add sessions and rooms! We are also optimistic that Dr. Mendenhall will still be able to be the Keynote Speaker (she will let us know in the fall). In the mean time, I encourage you all to read her amazing books:

Mendenhall, Emily
Rethinking Diabetes: Entanglements with Trauma, Poverty and HIV.
Cornell University Press, New York, 2019
Syndemic Suffering: Social Distress, Depression and Diabetes among Mexican Immigrant Women.
Routledge, New York, 2012

Stay well, stay home, but stay connected.

Janet Page-Reeves
SWAA President
From sourdough starter and pandemic baking to contactless grocery shopping and virtual tip jars for restaurants on the fringe of survival, students in Sarah Grant's new "Global Ethnographies of Food" class are seeing firsthand the complexities of food systems and food choices during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Students are being encouraged to think about the food supply chain, the labor that goes into producing their food, advertising and packaging, and ultimately, what they eat and why. "When we see articles about farmers dumping milk, meat-processing plants shutting down and overwhelmed food banks, we might think about this not in terms of what 'COVID-19 did' to the food system, but rather how the coronavirus revealed an already broken food system in dramatic fashion," explained Grant, a Cal State Fullerton assistant professor of anthropology. "I've encouraged my students to think critically about food availability, an emergent culture of panic buying, and like all crises, how COVID-19 exacerbates underlying inequities around health, race and food access," she said. "This was the direction our discussions were heading anyway, but COVID-19 catapulted these experiences into our purview."

The pandemic also spurred impromptu class readings about wet markets, zoonotic transfer, "bat soup" commentaries and race. "Anthropology, because of its interdisciplinary nature and ability to combine historical contexts with contemporary experiences, is especially well-positioned to question these commentaries and think carefully about discourses of blame and the everyday experience of the pandemic," said Grant.

**Developing a Class About Food**

Grant, who joined the university in 2015, was excited to discover CSUF had recently launched a minor in food studies. She began to envision a food studies course that would challenge students to think beyond the "coolness" of the subject. From "fake food" to "post-socialist food," the class uses ethnographies of food to think through larger global issues of power, race, gender, class and climate change, among other topics. Some examples of class topics include instant noodles, the history of soybeans and milk in the Republic of China, artificial flesh and cultured meat, food insecurity and hunger. "The question at the crux of my research and, really, guiding this class, is how food illuminates the vast spectrum of complex human experiences, whether we're talking about rapid economic development, loss, anxiety or hope," said Grant, whose research focuses on the coffee industry in Vietnam.
When the university shifted to online instruction amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Grant encouraged students to keep a "stay-at-home" food journal analyzing their daily food and food culture habits. "The food journal asks students to think about what is or isn't on grocery store shelves; how local businesses are adjusting to the pandemic; who does grocery shopping in the household; and how the pandemic has shifted consumption, cooking and eating habits," she said. "I hope students will 'see' what they eat in a new light, but also think carefully about how the pandemic may change dietary habits, daily schedules and tie into our well-being in new ways."

**The Future of Food in America**

As a critical food studies educator and researcher, Grant believes it is important to leave students with the tools to understand the pandemic and its long-term implications for those who were already hungry, malnourished and food insecure in America.

She notes that many universities, including CSUF, have campus food banks, pantries and basic needs programs. "Although I recognize how important it is to address student food insecurity during and after the pandemic, I think it's equally important to question how and why we have hungry students at all," said Grant. "Despite supply chain breaks, most of us will make it through the pandemic well-fed. But those who were already struggling to feed themselves and their families will continue to struggle," she said. "I hope the pandemic will be a wake-up call to think holistically about food justice and what we can do structurally to feed our communities with healthy, accessible food."

While she's seen glimmers of hope in her own community — consumers willing to share their resources with others, independently owned retailers helping to keep the neighborhood fed, and support for small-scale food sharing programs — Grant doesn't see Americans transitioning to a farm-to-table utopia anytime soon. "Even though people are sharing their citrus and avocados and learning how to bake bread, food scholars know that farm-to-table is not a universally applicable model," explained Grant. "Not everyone can grow their own food, not everyone has an oven or a kitchen and not all local produce vendors accept CalFresh. The future of food in America, post-pandemic or not, only looks bright when we acknowledge these limitations and address them."

In the meantime, Grant expects a slow recovery from the pandemic for farmers and seasonal laborers due to complicated supply chains, as well as shifts in the everyday experience of food shopping. Restaurants and other social food spaces, she says, will over time re-emerge as social gathering spaces. "Food goes beyond nutrition and sustenance — it plays a significant social and cultural role in our lives," she said. "We'll be back to eating out and social occasions over food in due time, but I hope we do so with a mindfulness that considers what we value in food in terms of wages and benefits for those producing, transporting and serving it."
The Evolution of Face Masks: 1918 to the Present


Maxi-Pads, Half an Orange: Asia’s Scramble for Surgical Masks Springs Creative Solutions.


Above, from top: Big grin mask; South Korea’s solution to drinking while wearing a mask; and crab claw mask.

A man in Caracas, Venezuela, wears a face mask while he carries his dog wearing a protective suit.


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Making Masks at Home

Hilarie Kelly writes:

These are two of the masks made by David J. Keulen, MD [husband] of Hilarie]. After researching mask design online and trying a few prototypes, he began manufacturing these at home from tight-woven, 100% cotton. They are double thickness, with a slit on the inner surface for inserting a disposable, industrial-grade piece of filter material cut from a furnace filter replacement obtained from Loewe’s. The cord is fashioned as a single loop.

The bottom end of the loop with the toggle goes over the head first; the toggle will rest at the nape of the neck. The mask portion is then positioned correctly over the mouth and nose. (The mask portion can slide along the cord to position it. Wash hands before donning mask!) The upper loop is then put over the head and the cord positioned on each side to rest on top of each ear. Finally, the cord is tightened using the toggle. Cord toggle locks can be easily ordered online as craft or camping supplies. Other material are also easily obtainable online.
Keeping A Sense of Humor in Challenging Times... 

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe social and economic disruption, as well as the tragic loss of thousands of people. At the same time, we have all seen many examples of the general willingness of people to cope with the problems not only with determination, but also with humor, creativity and flair. Here are some examples of the many being shared via email and social media:

**PANIC ROOM 2020**

Source: [https://imgflip.com/i/3s1vnd](https://imgflip.com/i/3s1vnd)

**Post-Coronavirus males, displaying their Hunter Gatherer prowess in order to attract mates**


**My house by the end of self isolation**

Contributed by Linda Crowder [appears all over Internet—unsure of original source].

**Another “My House By the End of Self-Isolation.”**

What Museums Are Doing to Adapt and Stay Relevant in COVID’s New Digital Age
By Angelica Flores (University of La Verne)

My name is Angelica Flores. I am a first generation college student at the University of La Verne, in my final year of a Bachelors in Anthropology. If you are anything like me, you are spending way too much time on the internet, procrastinating on important deadlines and stress baking to keep from thinking. Realizing that the only hobbies you have are going out and spending money is a shock to most of us.

Instagram:

With the novel coronavirus changing the way we go about daily life, cultural and public spaces have had to “get with the times,” and that means virtual tours and Instagram. Social media platforms have been around for a while now, and although most museums have accounts there, they have never been as active as they are right now. With their doors closing off public access, museums have had to get creative. Here are some examples, local and distant.

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)
- The Getty
- The Norton Simon Museum
- Natural History Museum of Los Angeles Anthropology Department This one’s for the anthropologists out there.
Mark Twain really loved cats. So much so that the writer and humorist was reported to have between 11 and 32, and even rented kittens when he was on vacation so he wouldn’t go without feline companionship.” Smithsonian Instagram

Google Arts & Culture:
Google Arts & Culture collaborated with over 500 museums around the world to set up virtual tours for those stuck at home. I have compiled a list of some local, out-of-state, and international museums that Google Arts & Culture has partnered with.

Local:
- LACMA – Los Angeles, California
- The J. Paul Getty Museum – Los Angeles, California
- UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center – Los Angeles, California
- The Museum of African American Art – Los Angeles, California
- USC Fisher Museum of Art – Los Angeles, California
- Wende Museum – Culver City, California

Out of State:
- The MET – New York, New York
- The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture – Seattle, Washington
- Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History – Washington, D.C.
- RISD Museum – Providence, Rhode Island

International:
- The Louvre – Paris, France
- National Museum of Death – Aguascalientes, Mexico
- Acropolis Museum – Athens, Greece
- National Archaeological Museum of Naples – Naples, Italy
- The Israel Museum, Jerusalem – Jerusalem, Israel
- National Archaeology Museum – Lisbon, Portugal

Angelica Flores is a Senior at the University of La Verne. She is currently majoring in Anthropology and is expected to start her Masters degree at the University of London Institute in Paris in Urban History and Culture, in Fall of 2020. She hopes to pursue a career in Museum Education. Her hobbies include cooking, yoga and rereading the Harry Potter series.
On a beautiful, sunny Saturday, February 29, before any of us truly anticipated the quarantine-like conditions we now find ourselves in, SWAA Vice President Jayne Howell (CSULB) and I spent the day in Long Beach, California attending special events at two museums there, the Pacific Island Ethnic Arts Museum (PIEAM) and the affiliated Museum of Latin American Arts (MOLAA.) We were joined for part of our day by Pamela Roberts, a professor of Human Development (CSULB.)

Our first experience of the day took place at the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum in Long Beach: a Maori haka workshop taught by transplanted Kiwi, Amelia Butler, founder of the organization Learn Maori Abroad, which offers language classes, training in the iconic Maori performance arts of haka and poi-ball dance, and traditional Maori performances by the group, Ngā Ānahera Māori. The broad interest in Pacific Island cultures has been a topic I have written about previously. PIEAM exists because of the large and diverse Island diasporic community and because of considerable cross-over interest in their arts among the general public. The museum has hosted many cultural gatherings and activities throughout its decade-long history as the “first museum dedicated to Pacific Island arts and cultures in the contiguous United States.”

https://www.facebook.com/pieam/ The common thread between diverse Pacific Island cultures is represented by the iconic house motif painted on the colorful exterior of the museum building, replicated inside by a palm-frond thatched reception structure or house, called hale in Hawaiian and whare in Maori. The museum director and curator, Fran Lujan, graciously explained to me that this small rep-
lica of a community house was built my “many hands of Pacific Islanders in California,” led by a Marshallese. Pointing out that community houses are called by many names across the islands, and have many styles and uses, Fran went on to note that the topic warrants an entire article on its own, something I hope to see written more about by Pacific Islander scholars in the future.

The stated mission of the museum, from their website, is “to amplify the collective wisdom of the people of Oceania, through a permanent collection, educational programs, rotating exhibits, and living arts. Our purpose is to connect the community to resources and foster intercultural exchanges with appreciation and respect.” The museum has a history of community engagement, events, and workshops, in spite of occasional lean times. [https://www.pieam.org/](https://www.pieam.org/)

Amelia Butler began the workshop in front of the model thatched house just inside the front door, teaching us how to introduce ourselves to strangers in proper Maori fashion through the poetic pepeha recitation. In pairs, we practiced Maori tradition by introducing ourselves to a partner, first by citing the mountain to which we have a spiritual attachment, then the river or other body of water we feel closest to, then the canoe or other vehicle of history that brought us to where we are in life now, on to our ancestral ethnicity, and then naming the marae, or sacred space that we most identify with. These points are each metaphors for the identities of place, heritage, and social belonging that define us. Only at the end of this recitation, which begins with our earthly environment, proceeds through our social matrix, and identifies our spiritual refuges—only then does one state an individual, personal name. This emphatically makes the point that our individual selves are distilled from everything and everyone around us. We do not stand alone.

Amelia kindly encouraged those Americans who may be more geographically less rooted and less decisively kin-enmeshed to be creative with their pepeha, even though Maori from New Zealand take the points more literally. Inspired, I mentioned not only my nominal Irish heritage, but also my “hula genealogy” as is common practice among hula dancers, for whom it is proper protocol to recite the most important kumu who have taught them.

In front of the whare thatched-roof house structure, Amelia demonstrated the Maori powhiri, the welcoming ceremony for visitors, which is a common setting for a haka performance. This website provides a good description of what is usually included in the welcoming of guests by the home people: [https://maaori.com/misc/powhiri.htm](https://maaori.com/misc/powhiri.htm) Jayne Howell recommends the light-hearted film about a fictional Maori repatriation incident, depicting a powhiri in a New Zealand village for a visiting British museum official. That film, “The Man Who Lost His Head,” is currently available on Amazon. (The particular scene can be enjoyed in this short clip, from minute 6:16: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGU_t45hl4I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGU_t45hl4I))

Once the exterior ceremony was completed, visitors were welcomed into the model house, where an informal question-and-answer session was held. By this time, so many more visitors had arrived that there was not enough room for everyone, this being a smaller model of the usually much larger community houses. Amelia pointed out that in an actual Maori communal wharenui (“big house”), the internal structure of the building (e.g., the beams and other major supports) would symbolically represent the parts of the body of an important ancestor, another very powerful metaphor.

Throughout the early morning, people continued to arrive at the museum to join the workshop: individuals, couples, families with children of varying cultural backgrounds (Islander and not), attesting to the hybrid appeal of the haka. The entire group moved outside to the tropical garden area to learn the words and movements of the haka for the day, Toia Mai, which calls for the host village’s canoes to escort guests to the shore. There we all were on this small triangle of land at Alamitos and 7th Street in densely-populated Long Beach, rhythmically gesturing, stamping our feet, slapping ourselves, and chanting in loud unison [see box on right]:

Note: You can see and hear a New Zealand cultural practitioner perform the full call-and-response version of this haka on YouTube here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6QkHQ1E86w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6QkHQ1E86w)
After learning and repeating this haka several times, the sense of fellowship was high and the workshop concluded with an optional hongi, the traditional Maori “nose kiss” in which two people touch noses and inhale each other’s breath. This action of acceptance and mutual respect was officially suspended in New Zealand since the advent of COVID-19.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/maori-tribe-restricts-hongi-greeting-over-coronavirus

For more information on Amelia Butler’s work, see https://www.kulturamag.com/article/amelia-butler? and visit her organization’s https://www.learnmaoriabroad.com/, her Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/learnmaoriabroad/, and follow her on Instagram @learnmaoriabroad.

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After all that physical exertion, we decided to enjoy some food at a tiki bar called the Bamboo Club. https://www.facebook.com/bambooclublb/ There is an interesting story behind this bar, of the hybrid lives and cuisines typical of this region. https://lbpost.com/hilo/food/melissa-ortizs-new-tiki-bar-menu-is-elevating-long-beachs-food-scene  The inventive executive chef, Army vet Melissa Ortiz, is still producing take-out food and drink to help the community through the pandemic. As with “tiki culture” in general, the place is inspired by but not really of the Pacific Islands. The décor is emphatically tropical, as is captured by this intense patio mural.
The Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA) held a reception that evening to highlight eight stunning new murals that have been added to their permanent collection. [https://molaa.org/oaxacalifornia](https://molaa.org/oaxacalifornia) The murals were originally commissioned to be on display at the Los Angeles Public Library for the 2017 Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA Initiative, with support from the Getty Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. These enormous works, painted in bold detail by Oaxacan duo artist collective, Tlacolulokos (Dario Canul and Cosijoesa Cernas), “explore the intersections of language and culture as a key lifeline – sustaining the shared experience between Los Angeles and Mexico, and beyond.” Their purpose was to counter the invisibility and marginalization of indigenous and migrant people, specifically those from Oaxaca, Mexico who have made a life in California. One of the many explanatory signs in this exhibit explains that “…California is also OaxaCALifornia; this term describes a binational culture, a region both real due to the large migrant population but also imagined…” The murals express this complex and layered culture as “a network of symbols and of a culture constantly reinventing itself.” The exhibition is multilingual, with signage in both English and Spanish and also rich with references to Zapotec speech and the symbolic languages of colonized, transnational youth in Los Angeles and Oaxaca.

There are striking design elements that hold this exhibit together across each mural: the blood-red colonial ceramic background of each one; the candidly photographic quality of the human figures’ poses; exuberant, fantastical tattooing, graffiti, and insignia emblazoned on everything other than the background, referencing connections across borders and over five hundred years of history. These images are potently contemporary, urgent and imbued intentionally with contradictions. The murals juxtapose several strong themes: brutal suppression of indigenousness that never fully succeeds, colonized people who embrace their own colonization, strong women who defiantly persist through multiple betrayals, resilient youth who must grow up fast. Tattoos on almost all the figures suggest they yearn for something (belonging?) and embody both spiritual indigeneity and the acceptance of Catholic and modern L.A identities, and this is echoed in the clothing the figures wear as well.

The crowd in the galleries that night, just prior to the imposition of our current regimen of social distancing, was lively and buzzing with intimate appreciation of the complex yet familiar imagery. The sheer scale of the murals draws the observer in, demanding that we wonder at their individual stories. Who is the boy who gazes back at us so knowingly, art
pens clutched in his small hand; why is the girl playing the trumpet sitting on a stack of books (one on Foucault); why does the young woman wearing the combination of traditional Oaxacan and commercial Western dress (the one with the heavily tattooed bare legs) have an entire list of crossed-out male names tattooed on her wrist; and is that the Santa Monica Pier behind the fellow in the big hat who clutches a model, colonial-era Spanish ship? I found myself momentarily captivated by the iconic face of Toypurina, the famous Tongva woman who led an uprising against the cruelties of the mission system in early San Gabriel, her portrait pinned with an arrow to the helmeted skull of a conquistador.

Some of the enormous murals in the gallery—for scale, compare size of murals with visitors in photo top right.
Jayne Howell, with her extensive field research background in Oaxaca, helpfully explained some of the intricate Oaxacan-specific references, like the elaborate and flower bedecked candle held by one forlorn young man, and feather dance regalia worn by another who is being tattooed, and painfully, it seems.

The exhibit itself includes abundant signage that explicated many nuances. One of the signs (“Wherever You May Go”) even offers this reason why three of the women have smartphones in their hands, and one shirtless fellow carries an SLR camera: “Technology becomes a way of telling us who we are, who we would like to be, and how we would like others to see us.”

Once museums are open again, post-pandemic, and it is possible for you to see these murals at MOLAA yourself, prepare to be overwhelmed and absorbed by their immensity, nuance, and detail. Thinking forward, can we even imagine what that future will be like? Will transnationalism and art ever be quite the same?

Before leaving MOLAA, we quickly passed through another, powerfully moving exhibit, titled “Arte, Mujer Y Memoria: Arpilleras from Chile.” [https://molaa.org/arte-mujer-memoria-exhibition][2] [see photos next page] The exhibit consists of over thirty placemat-sized, hand-sewn, arpilleras, which are cloth applique de-pictions of Chilean women’s perceptions of the painful struggles they face in the sometimes violent, post-Allende/post-Pinochet era, with its continued struggles for justice under successive regimes that employ varying levels of militarized repression. The politics of Chile, one of the more important economies in Latin America, are complex, and recent events there have demonstrated that the ghosts of authoritarianism have not been fully exorcised. (See, for example, this assessment of political unrest from last year: [https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/05/chile-ongoing-protests-pinochet-dictatorship-looms-large/][3]) The arpilleras serve as both protest and therapy. Their production and marketing has been an organizational coping mechanism in the face of periodic family and community dismemberment. These pieces were created collectively from 1976 through 2019 by Chilean women’s neighborhood groups. They were then marketed by transnational women’s groups on behalf of the women artisans, many of whom needed the income to support themselves and their sometimes fractured families. The arpilleras in this exhibit were collected by MEMCH-LA (Movement for the Emancipation of the Chilean Woman-Los Angeles.) Perhaps the end date of this exhibition, Sept. 6, 2020, will change because of the pandemic closure, or perhaps not, given the logistical challenges of scheduling travelling exhibits. MOLAA has made available a virtual, online tour of many of the pieces here: [https://molaa.org/arpilleras-online][4].
Please take a minute to imagine how economically costly closures will ultimately be for museums, in terms of the implacable math of calculating facility and exhibit costs against lost revenue. Imagine the lost opportunities for public viewing of exhibits, for public and scholarly discourse about them, for public gatherings that both reaffirm our sense of community belonging and also take us outside of our usual zone of familiarity, for education and scholarship? How will this pandemic impact the men and women who produce the art we view, and the communities that nurture them? This is a moment to contemplate further the role of museums in society, at a time we cannot so easily take them for granted.

To end on a positive note, I highly recommend the short and highly stimulating Facebook Live broadcasts of Kara Cooney – Egyptologist to nurture your humor and your intellect during these challenging times. Her talks are archived on her Facebook page, and a few are also found on her YouTube site. Her public figure website is [http://karacooney.squarespace.com/](http://karacooney.squarespace.com/), and if you do not do Facebook, you can access here some of her recent short talks, including one she just produced on April 25, together with Jonathan Winneeman (also an Egyptologist at UCLA) on the question of how the ancient Egyptians may or may not have seen their “race” and why this question rubs many of us the wrong way. She has published some of her academic work under the name Kathlyn M. Cooney and is Associate Professor of Egyptian Art and Architecture at UCLA and Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. [https://nelc.ucla.edu/person/kara-cooney/](https://nelc.ucla.edu/person/kara-cooney/)
On June 3, 2010 as Ryan drove by, heading south on State Highway 68 to examine some land he was thinking of purchasing to run cattle, he stopped and asked if I was all right. Was I getting the vitamins necessary to support my walking? My reply was, I believe I am. He suggested I drink pureéd green vegetables. Any kind of greens can be used and, although fruit can be added for taste, the large bottle of the elixir he had with him was 100% green vegetables. He poured some in an empty water bottle for me, filling it about a third full, saying something to the effect, you may gag and not be able to get it all down at once. With four or five swallows with short pauses, but no gagging, I downed it, which surprised him. Today the weather turned hot, a good day for an extra dose of vitamins.

Carole Fontana suggested since both Kate Taylor and Carole were special education teachers, we get together when we reached Salt Lake City, so we did. Kate estimated that when she began her career, 90% of her time was devoted to teaching. Now she estimates it is around 50% with more devoted to meetings with parents or administrators, committee meetings, in-service education, and adapting to constantly changing new curriculums which are not necessarily better, but best described as “change for change’s sake.” Much curriculum change is motivated by publishers rather than by teacher’s assessment of the needs of their students. (College teachers I know at both community colleges and four year universities agree with her comment on publishers.) Kate also has a number of excellent quilts her grandmother and great grandmother made which she showed us.

On the seventh we had breakfast with Rev. Stan DeLong who we heard preach in Delta. He and his wife Mavis have a condominium on Little Cottonwood Creek (a nice setting with a feel like you are either in the country or a park) in Salt Lake City. Sandbags protected the house from the creek. This winter’s snowpack in the Wasatch Range was heavy and additional snow fell two weeks earlier reaching low elevations; now with weather warming the snow was melting and the creek swelling. Water nearly reached their condominium but subsided a bit; the future still remains uncertain.

Carole (my wife) picked me up at Little Mountain Summit on the ninth where I was talking to Gary who parked his car and was enjoying the view. He passed me as I was walking up Emigrant Canyon from Salt Lake City and congratulated me for reaching the summit and declared my walk “heartwarming,” an antidote to the violence dominating the news. He felt I should be on the TV news; I wasn’t. As I continued across the nation I heard similar comments, but only once made TV news.

From Little Mountain Summit it was a steep downhill to State Highway 65, then up a series of a steep switchbacks to Big Mountain Pass. The wind was at its very best today, and as I approached the pass, it grew stronger. Carole parked at Big Mountain Pass’ summit, reading while waiting for me. Several cars were parked there, orienting themselves to the view. About 20 yards from where they were parked was an outhouse; none walked to it, they drove those 20 yards rather than buck the wind, Carole said. After being picked up, we checked out the location of Jeremy Ranch Road. No sign on State 65 indicated its existence, so I emailed Carole Fontana who said it was just past the 13 mile marker. Sure enough, there it was.

Jeremy Ranch Road is a dirt road linking State 65 to Kimball Junction. Since it had rained the last few days, it was muddy in places. Traffic was light and slow. East Canyon Creek paralleled the road, if it is appropriate to use parallel to describe such a meandering stream with so many ox bows (see picture). Many trees, shrubs and wildflowers were in broom. I would hate to say it was the most beautiful stretch I walked, but it certainly would rank right up there.

In the breakfast room of the motel where we were staying in Park City, on the 18th, we met one of Carole’s former aids who went on to earn a special education credential and is now enjoying a successful career in the field.
From Park City on June 16th my route took me through Kamas to Francis. Unlike Park City, which seemed an upscale suburb of Salt Lake City, Kamas was rural Utah. I stopped at Joe’s Country Store for coffee and sat on a bench in front. Joe’s wasn’t busy, so Jeannie, the clerk, and a customer came out and we talked as I drank my coffee. Jeannie had a British accent, and in fact was from England.

As I continued southeast on State Highway 35 on the 18th, the road began following the Provo River which was running high, although by the driftwood left behind it had recently run higher. Traffic was light so the only sound was the water rushing downslope. As a boy I enjoyed that sound during the winter when the Mantanzas Creek ran high. As I gained elevation leading to Wolf Creek Pass, the aspens that were leafed out at a lower elevation were still in wrapped in buds. Nearing the pass there were ponds with resident frogs engaged in some type of croaking contest, which replaced the sound of rushing water. Listening to them was enjoyable. Kathryn Deckert and Joan Thompson slowly passed as they rode their bicycles up the 8% grade to the 9,485 foot summit. When I reached the summit they were sitting, relaxing on support posts for a guard rail. (Those posts make decent stools, which I frequently used as I made my way the nation.) We chatted for awhile. They were from Park City and also knew Carole Fontana. Beyond the pass the road paralleled Wolf Creek with a down grade of 8%.

As I approached Hanna on June 19th, sagebrush became the dominate vegetation which imparted a pleasant aroma. Hanna was spread along about seven miles of State 35 and consists of farm houses, alfalfa fields, cattle, horses, campgrounds along the Duchesne River, the Hanna Cafe and a general store. South of Hanna I passed a small herd of elk laying under some trees. As I passed they rose and bounded off. Tabiona was similar to Hanna where briefly I talked to a farmer who was helping a neighbor, whose son had recently committed suicide, with his pivot arm irrigation system.

On Father’s Day we attended Myton Community Presbyterian Church. Rev. Marilyn Collins baptized a 17-year-old boy suffering early onset dementia. He likes to be hugged so after the service everyone hugged him. We were told a year ago he was perfectly normal. During the service we asked prayers for Rich Klingman’s father. Rich was one of my students who, along with his wife Chris, helped with the California Indian Conference in 1999, as well as several other conferences. Rich planned to walk with me in Nevada, but due to his father’s declining health, didn’t. He emailed me saying his father passed away and asked me to have prayers said for him in whatever church we attended. It made sense in an ironic way, since it was Father’s Day.

A potluck followed the service, and we mentioned we had attended Delta Presbyterian Church. They knew Rev. DeLong since he had occasionally flown there to preach, (Stan is a pilot). After church I only walked eight miles. Since it was Father’s Day I stopped several times to talk with our children who called on my cell phone. (When I walk I stay focused on traffic, so while talking I stop walking.) I passed a large elk farm, but unfortunately the herds were out of camera range.

On June 21st I reached the junction of State 35 and River Road which my DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer identified as Utah, a community consisting of a cemetery and a few houses. From there I took River Road heading south. Before long the Prices stopped to ask if I was OK. They offered me a bottle of water apologizing it wasn’t too cold. It was colder than the lukewarm water in my backpack, and I finished it before they were able to drive a mile down the road. Before long two others stopped to check on me.

From Ballard through Fort Duchesne and Gusher, irrigated fields grew increasingly infrequent and desert vegetation increased in frequency. Mario stopped to see if I was OK. He works for a Salt Lake City firm and drives daily to Vernal making deliveries along the way. He gave me a cold can of cola. A few hours later on his return he stopped and handed me another one. A couple of hours later Kathy stopped and as we were talking, the arm of a teenage girl extended from a back seat window and handed me a cold bottle of Gatorade. Additionally, Clement, David and Jonathan, as well as some others whose names I didn’t get stopped to see if I was all right. I began to question if I was in the “Middle of Nowhere.”

The following day, Mario once again passed and handed me another cold cola. Later Jason McKenna, a reporter for the Basin Standard, pulled up beside me and interviewed me in the air conditioned cab of his pickup truck, a nice break on a hot day. Others stopped today as well; Kris, Eva, Jasmine and Craig. This all occurred along U.S. Highway 40. Was I really in the “Middle of Nowhere” as I had been told by a Duchesne County Deputy Sheriff? ♦

After retiring from Cuesta College, long-time SWAA member Bill Fairbanks walked across America between 2009 and 2014. These are stories from his travels.
What Did Ancient Romans Do Without Toilet Paper?

By Stephen E. Nash

https://www.sapiens.org/column/curiosities/ancient-roman-bathrooms/

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We’ve all been caught unawares by our digestive tract at one time or another.

It happened to the Nash family several months ago. We were nearing the end of an extended road trip, driving down a secondary highway through a sparsely populated area of Colorado at night, when one of my 9-year-old twin sons had to use the bathroom. Despite my pleading, he said he couldn’t make it to the next town. (He had to poop.) So we pulled over and headed for the bushes. After he took care of his business, we realized that we didn’t have toilet paper with us.

The whole dramatic episode got me thinking, and for the next couple of hours, I pondered toilet paper and the cultural nature of bathroom routines. (Cut me some slack. It was a long drive.)

Toilet paper is now such a routine part of our lives that we rarely give it any thought. That boring reality, however, should make us think—because toilet paper is an artifact, a technology, and is therefore grounded in culture.

As we finally re-entered Denver—my wife and kids blissfully asleep—I saw the Colorado state capitol building, beautifully lit on the horizon. I started thinking about the ancient Romans. With tall columns, colonnades, and a high, golden dome, the capitol is nothing if not a Roman temple to civics.

Modern American society, and Western societies more generally, tend to look back on ancient Rome as the pinnacle of Western civilization. We emulate their institutions and cultural practices. Why? Are they worth it?

When I thought more about their everyday habits, I realized that, despite all of their accomplishments, ancient Romans engaged in some practices that many people today would find thoroughly revolting. Take a minute to consider, for example, what many of those supposedly “civilized” people did when they had to go to the bathroom.

When Mt. Vesuvius erupted on August 24 in A.D. 79, Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other Roman settlements were sealed as time capsules. They were first excavated in the 18th century, and since then these sites have given us a wonderful view into ancient Roman society.
Many of the bathrooms uncovered at Pompeii and elsewhere were communal. In many cases, they were beautiful, with frescoes on the walls, sculptures in the corners, and rows of holes carved into cold, Italian marble slabs. Roman toilets didn’t flush. Some of them were tied into internal plumbing and sewer systems, which often consisted of just a small stream of water running continuously beneath the toilet seats.

In the same way that we use an American-style toilet, a Roman user would sit down, take care of business, and watch number two float blissfully away down the sewer system. But instead of reaching for a roll of toilet paper, an ancient Roman would often grab a tersorium (or, in my technical terms, a “toilet brush for your butt”). A tersorium is an ingenious little device made by attaching a natural sponge (from the Mediterranean Sea, of course) to the end of a stick. Our ancient Roman would simply wipe him- or herself, rinse the tersorium in whatever was available (running water and/or a bucket of vinegar or salt water), and leave it for the next person to use. That’s right, it was a shared butt cleaner. (And of course, there were other means of wiping as well, such as the use of abrasive ceramic discs called pessoi.

OK, so ancient Roman pooping habits seem strange, but what about their customs around pee?

As best we can tell from historic and archaeological data, ancient Romans peed in small pots in their homes, offices, and shops. When those small pots became full, they dumped them into large jars out in the street. Just like with your garbage, a crew came by once a week to collect those hefty pots of pee and bring them to the laundromat. Why? Because ancient Romans washed their togas and tunics in pee.

Human urine is full of ammonia and other chemicals that are great natural detergents. If you worked in a Roman laundromat, your job was to stomp on clothes all day long—barefoot and ankle deep in colossal vats of human pee.

(Frankly, I wonder why we haven’t emulated this aspect of Roman culture in our age of green, eco-friendly, and sustainable businesses. I’m thinking of opening a chain called Urine-Urout All-Natural Laundromat. It’s a sparkling business opportunity!)

As peculiar as personal hygiene practices in ancient Rome may seem to us, the historical fact is that many Romans successfully and sustainably used tersoria and washed their clothes in pee for several centuries—far longer than we’ve used toilet paper. Indeed, toilet paper is not a universal technology even today, as any trip to India, rural Ethiopia, or remote areas of China will make abundantly clear.

The memorable stop we made for my son in rural Colorado will always remind me of our culture’s widespread dependence on toilet paper. We’ve become so accustomed to the stuff that we are loath to consider widely used alternatives. ( Heck, even the elegant bidet gets short shrift in our society.)

As an archaeologist, this is surprising to me, especially because toilet paper was formally introduced in this country only in 1857, a comparatively short time ago. At that time, New York entrepreneur Joseph Gayetty first created commercial toilet paper: each individual paper sheet bore his name. He claimed that, in addition to their novel utilitarian function, they were medicinal and prevented hemorrhoids.

In 1890, Clarence and E. Irvin Scott developed the first toilet paper on rolls; their brand thrives today. (It happens to be my favorite. Too much information?) Like Gayetty’s sheets, Scott tissue was originally marketed as a medicinal product. In the late 1920s, Hoberg Paper Company marketed Charmin brand toilet paper to wom-
en, with an emphasis on softness (thank goodness) and femininity, rather than medicinal properties that didn’t actually work.

Today, toilet paper is ubiquitous in Western cultures; it’s a US$9.5 billion-a-year industry in the United States.” Americans, in their typical excess, use more than 50 pounds per person per year! About 1.75 tons of raw fiber are required to manufacture each ton of toilet paper. That doesn’t seem sustainable, and frankly, I’m surprised that people haven’t protested more as a result.

Given these numbers and the marketing efforts behind them, it’s hard to argue that the use of toilet paper is somehow natural. On the contrary, toilet paper is nothing more than a technology. So the next time you’re enjoying a morning constitutional, think about the fact that defecation and urination are more than biological functions; they are cultural activities that involve artifacts and technologies that change through time.

Speaking of which, it’s high time that we consider changing how we clean ourselves after we use the toilet. Tersorium, anyone?

NOTES:
1. Commercial toilet paper
https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/23210/toilet-paper-history-how-america-convinced-world-wipe

2. US$9.5 billion industry
https://www.mic.com/articles/127961/what-toilet-paper-is-doing-to-the-planet#.rUcJgqBEz

3. 1.75 tons of raw fiber

Stephen E. Nash

Stephen E. Nash is a historian of science and an archaeologist at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. He studies a wide range of subjects, including dendrochronology (tree-ring dating), the history of museums, the archaeology of west-central New Mexico, and Russian gem carving sculptures by Vasily Konovalenko.

Nash has published numerous books, most recently Stories in Stone: The Enchanted Gem-Carving Sculptures of Vasily Konovalenko and An Anthropologist’s Arrival: A Memoir. He lives in Denver with his wife and three boys. Follow him on Twitter @nash_dr.
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We welcome your submissions!

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