

Enjoying leisure activities in time of COVID is possible

Cal State LA launches Pandemic Diaries digital history project

BY PINKI CHEN

Last December, I was invited by a few friends to sing karaoke, using our own microphone and carefully keeping social distance while trying to have some leisure activity during the pandemic. I knew that singing increases one's lung capacity and is a great remedy to help people in living a long and healthy life, so, I decided to take up singing as a new hobby in addition to ballroom dancing four times a week.

Mr. Ma from Star Dancing Studio started a new recording studio. He repeatedly asked me to record a song in his studio. I thought it might be an interesting project to record a song sharing my 22 years' career as an event organizer: managing the annual Alhambra Lunar New Year celebration with a festival on Valley Boulevard and an art exhibit at the city hall. I particularly appreciated the confidence given by the Alhambra Chamber of Commerce and having the vital services provided by the Public Works and Police Department.

The process began in early January looking for and selecting photos. It was like walking into a tunnel of time recalling the participation of my two daughters when they were very young and receiving the overwhelming support from my partners, colleagues, event sponsors, and festival vendors.

I had to choose a song to reflect the theme and also match my voice range. I then learning the necessary skills of inhale/exhale and pitch. There were numerous rehearsals and recordings. Finally, I completed the recording and went into post production in mid-April.

For more than a year, we have lived through the most difficult and tragic times of our lives. However, I felt that I don't have to be beaten by the virus. I could be physically trapped in the house, but my mind and spirit should not be trapped at the same time.

Due to the pandemic, my job as a board member of the Los Angeles County Assessments Appeals has changed to virtual meetings. Just like thousands of other workers, I spent more time at home. With fewer outside activities and restricted contacts with family and friends, we all had to live by ourselves. I learned to enjoy myself



Pinki Chen, who received the Past Presidents Recognition Award from the Alhambra Chamber of Commerce, says she learned to enjoy herself while being alone during the pandemic.

while being alone.

It is the first time I discovered that there are many things one can do being alone. I decided to take on this challenging project doing something I never imaged I could accomplish. This experience taught me that even during the pandemic, we can still be creative and have fun along the way! I also wanted to share that it is never too late and we are never too old to pursue one's hobbies and dreams.

I bought my first house in the Midwick tract in 1980 and have worked in Alhambra since then. Now, I am happily retired and living in a nice community in Alhambra, which is my roots in my adopted homeland. The song *I Really Care* expresses my sincere gratitude to all the people who helped me along the way. I hope you will take the time to hear the song, even if it is in Chinese. You will get to know the event history and see a lot of familiar faces among the 60 photos in the video.

A second singing MV and a dance video will be released this month. Please visit the site to watch the MV on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/MDu6pGks4WI>. Your comments on YouTube will be greatly appreciated.

While navigating through the coronavirus pandemic since March 2020, the Cal State LA community has been adapting to a new normal of online learning, teleworking, social distancing, and sheltering in place.

Each of the tens of thousands of students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make up that community potentially has a unique or personal story about life under COVID-19.

With that in mind, Cal State LA is inviting every member of that vast, varied community to contribute digital diaries to a project that will collect and archive firsthand accounts of this historical moment.

"The Cal State LA community is very diverse, and what we try to do in Special Collections and Archives is collect stories of our diverse campus community," said Azalea Camacho, an archivist and special collections librarian who is the lead on the project.

"This is really important because usually their stories are missing from historical records, and they are not preserved," Ms. Camacho said. "The goal is to capture such experiences now, as they are happening."

The Cal State LA Pandemic Diaries Project, organized by the University Library Special Collections and Archives, aims to provide future researchers and historians with a better understanding of how individuals, as well as the collective community, adjusted to the uncertainty of this unprecedented time.

More than 100 student digital diaries have been submitted to date, but the Special Collections and Archives is seeking additional video or audio recordings, photographs, and written accounts to represent the full diversity of cultures and voices of Cal State LA and its surrounding community.

Ms. Camacho encouraged members of the neighboring communities and local businesses to also share their successes and challenges.

Their stories are "important and histor-



A notification regarding alternative instruction at Cal State LA is displayed on a digital screen on campus. (Photo: Emilio J. Flores/Cal State LA)

ically significant," she said. "The project's goal is to bring awareness of how our community is experiencing the pandemic, so it is important for everyone to voice their opinions and perspectives."

In addition to Ms. Camacho, the project team includes Jamie Zeffery, digitization projects assistant, who handles the digital submissions and processing of the digital diaries, and Juily Phun, professor of Asian and Asian American Studies, who provided the questions to guide participants through capturing their digital diaries.

Some of the questions that can be used as prompts for individuals who are recording their digital diaries include:

- How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting your life, family, or instruction?
- What is your daily life like during quarantine?
- What changes have you made to your daily routine to stay safe?
- What feelings are you experiencing?
- Have you had any revelations or realizations?

To submit a digital story, photo, or document, and for information on how to record a digital diary, visit the Pandemic Diaries Project instructions webpage. A virtual exhibition of the project will be displayed on the University Library website near the end of the spring semester.



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