

# COVID-19

that the program had predetermined, such as "A Trip Under the Sea," "A Ride in a Hot Air Balloon," and so forth. The elders would then be paired with a staff member who would transcribe their stories into Word documents. These stories were sent to our volunteer coordinator, Nik Sushka, and from there, volunteers were assigned a specific story to illustrate. We had about a week to illustrate the main elements of the story, and then we took

pictures of our illustrations and sent them back to our volunteer coordinators.

As a result of the pandemic, we were unfortunately not able to meet with the elders in person as we would have been under normal circumstances. In addition, they were unable to participate in our Zoom meetings because of identity security concerns. However, at the end of the program, we compiled all of the stories

and illustrations into a small anthology that we were able to print and ship to the residents! Through this collection of illustrated stories, they would still have a tangible representation of their experience even though most of it had to be virtual.

Pictured with this article are three illustrations (the 3rd illustration is on the cover) that I created as part of the Illustrating Elders' Stories program.

## Digital Storytelling with the Scholars *by Amy Carattini*

In ANTH 201, Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology, scholars are learning how to translate the principles of anthropology into a language and skill set that is applicable to all majors and careers. The application of articulating these learned skills is important because culture touches every dimension of our professional and personal lives.

Scholars are using the platform of digital storytelling to accomplish this aim in conjunction with Montgomery College's Digital Storytelling Community of Practice at the Paul Peck Humanities Institute. Mark Siegrist, a current MC student and digital storytelling intern, is embedded support for the class; in this role, he shares his tips for digital storytelling techniques as well as his passion for anthropology. In addition, the class also benefits from Nyrene Monforte's experience. Nyrene is both a current scholar in the class as well as a digital storytelling intern with a focus on documentary filming.

In the first part of this project, scholars begin a participant observation project in which they analyze a cultural phenomenon at a place of their choosing, for example, at a workplace, a farmers' market, a multicultural event, a hobby setting, or a café. During the spring semester, scholars started investigating an array of cultural experiences from a skateboard park to an engineering firm, and even on stage with actors preparing for performances. In light of the current coronavirus threat, students are now taking this assignment online to conduct digital ethnography by exploring web forums, blogs, facebook groups, youtube videos, and other discussion boards to explain, for example, the cultural impact of social distancing on education or how we circulate our memories with one another.

Through participation, observation, and interviews, they collect primary research data in the form of field notes, transcriptions, photographs, and audio and video recordings. Scholars then use these primary data to analyze and interpret their chosen cultural phenomenon. They write a five- to seven-page paper in which they reference anthropological concepts to better articulate their understanding of ideas such as cultural relativism (how people all over the world are doing similar things but differently) or how to avoid ethnocentric thinking (the idea that, without critical analysis and reflexivity, one can fall into the myth that one's own culture is superior to others; rather, one should acknowledge the complexity and holism inherent in each culture). Another objective is to more fully articulate how cultures are dynamic

and are fluid in response to cultural interaction over time—meaning that culture is not a vestige of the past but ever-changing in the present.

After scholars submit their papers, the second part of the semester is devoted to turning their analyses into a three- to five-minute digital story in which they integrate their field data into a visually narrated depiction of what they learned, taking the anthropological jargon out of the script. The goal is to be able to show the video to a friend or family member, a future employer, or other audiences so that their analyses and interpretations can be understood in language that is accessible to all and that clearly reflects the skills they have learned.

To this end, scholars are asked to be reflexive in their storytelling and to include their own lived experiences by identifying their own cultural norms and values as well as the commonalities and differences that exist between these experiences and those they participated in and observed. They are also asked to reflect on variables, such as socioeconomic class, gender, and country of birth, as well as to look more closely at their own cultural interactions. Finished stories work to incorporate all of these elements. The scholars then showcase their stories at the end of the semester!



Dr. Amy Carattini, a faculty member at MC, holds a PhD in sociocultural anthropology from the University of Maryland with a research interest in social class and comparative migration experiences. She coordinates anthropology courses at MC's Rockville and Takoma Park-Silver Spring campuses. She also collaborates with the Organization of American States (OAS), is a research consultant for the Society for Applied Anthropology, and co-edited the journal *Practicing Anthropology*.