

LIFE IN A TIME OF COVID-19

Janice Loo explains why and how the National Library is crowdsourcing materials on the impact of COVID-19 on life in Singapore.

for much of 2020, the world has been struggling to contain COVID-19, the disease caused by a novel coronavirus that emerged late last year. At the time of writing, the global pandemic has infected more than 34 million people and killed over 1.03 million.¹

Singapore saw its first case of COVID-19 on 23 January 2020, marking the start of an extraordinary period that saw the issuing of stringent measures to contain the spread of the virus. From 7 April to 1 June, the government imposed a “circuit breaker” to pre-empt further transmissions. Schools, offices and most retail outlets were closed and social gatherings prohibited. Everyone in Singapore was advised to stay home unless they had to step out for essential purposes.

Life has entered a new normal. While some restrictions have since

Janice Loo is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include collection management and content development as well as research and reference assistance on topics relating to Singapore and Southeast Asia.

been relaxed, it is mandatory for people to wear face masks when they leave home, places of worship have a cap on the number of congregants and large gatherings remain curtailed.

To document this extraordinary period, the National Library Board and the National Museum of Singapore issued a call in May 2020 for materials that capture how lives have changed as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

“Documenting COVID-19 in Singapore” invites the public to contribute content under two categories: daily life during the pandemic, and the experiences of frontline and essential workers as well as those who have demonstrated kindness or gone the extra mile to help the community.

So far, over 400 submissions comprising more than 2,600 photographs, stories, videos and nominations of websites relating to COVID-19 have been received by the National Library.

The photographs capture scenes such as shuttered retail shops and restaurants, deserted streets and empty buses and trains. There are also snapshots of daily life showing how people have adapted to the restrictions, how they found creative ways

This photo was taken by doctor and avid photographer Shyamala Thilagaratnam, whose team at the Health Promotion Board organised and implemented swab operations at migrant worker dormitories. Before administering the swab test, the team dons personal protective equipment and carefully checks the particulars of the workers. This photo forms part of a photo essay titled “COVID Chronicles”. Photo contributed by Dr Shyamala Thilagaratnam.

to spend time at home and how they stayed in touch with family and friends. The collection also features stories and photographs of those working on the frontlines to keep Singapore safe as well as individuals whose acts of giving have made a difference in the community.

The National Library will continue to collect photos and stories until the end of the year. To contribute, please visit <https://go.gov.sg/documenting-COVID19>. ♦

NOTE

- ¹ World Health Organization. (2020). *WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard*. Retrieved 5 October 2020 from <https://covid19.who.int/>

