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Throughout my life I have struggled with medical challenges, each providing me perspective and community outside the able-bodied world. Because of these experiences, I knew early on the importance of story – because of its role in shaping individual and communal realities – and the imperative that those who have something to say receive the audience and attention needed to be heard, seen, and understood. Throughout my education, I sought every opportunity to improve my ability to document and understand the complex realities within which all our stories reside. Through my time at The Evergreen State College (Evergreen) I have learned far more than how to set up an interview to be pleasing to the lens and the eye; I have also learned how to dig for the story and reveal the details that make the narrative blossom. As a filmmaker, I know when I have asked the right question from the contemplative pause that must precede any answer of real importance. To tell a story is an honor, because to be told something significant is a bond of trust.

My path at Evergreen allowed me to cross between disciplines in order to examine the shaping experiences that cast us on radically different courses, the ways we are educated by our surroundings, and the tools used to communicate these differences and resulting values. As I grew as a storyteller I exposed audiences to the stories which are often least heard by society. I developed empathy and understanding through studying the histories and current contexts of impacted communities. In my early studies and documentary work, I found these suppressed stories in the experiences of incarcerated people and the voices of Native people who fought to remain afloat in an education system not built for them.

Perhaps nothing has shaped my education and perceptions more significantly than my ongoing collaborative documentary film project through Evergreen. I have spent hundreds of hours in the field documenting the stories of farmworkers and community organizers engaged in the process of founding an indigenous-led farmworker union. While an outsider to this community, I have found myself rooted in the work because of the stories of farmworkers who were injured or disabled by their labor, and because of my personal experience with health narratives. Over time my role in this work has shifted from an intrigued observer to active, informed, and involved participant. To meet high ethical standards for this project I studied community health and the ways journalist, authors, and advocates confront the realities of the vulnerable communities they work with. I integrated theory into this work by simultaneously exploring the critical relationship that care and autonomy play in health. I continued this project in a studio art program where I began to see how to connect the artistic and archival threads in my work. My commitment never wavered as I wrote up a contract to spend a concentrated period of time in the critical process of editing, and refining additional interviews and filming. Yearning to return to the community, I arranged an internship with a grassroots organization that supports and nurtures indigenous farmworker union organizing.

In order to deepen my understanding, I spent several quarters studying Spanish. This held great importance for my learning, as I had never had a direct conversation with my new friends – we always communicated through my Spanish-speaking co-director. Through this effort, I was rewarded with greater trust and a more personal relationship with our film's participants.

In the program Literature, Literacy, and Disability I returned to my roots studying disability narratives and history. In this space, I expanded my capacity for critical and literary analysis, and my ability to communicate stories through creative writing. In order to connect theory to practice, I worked as a mentor to an adult with physical and mental disabilities. This experience provided me the opportunity to participate in community work supporting and uplifting the voices, learning, and expression of those so often pushed to the margins. As a final project, I completed an in-depth analysis of labor rights and history as they relate to guest-worker programs in the United States through the lens of disability.

As I leave Evergreen, I have built skills in communicating, witnessing, and framing – each allowing me to elevate and lend a platform to stories that require telling. I plan to continue studying and growing as a storyteller, writer, and documentarian, to complicate and interweave the narratives that shape our world.