



Virtual Museum

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Westport Museum & Portraitist Jerri Graham Partner to Document Westporters' Corona Virus Response

Long-Lens Oral History Project from Connecticut's hardest hit town to be archived for future generations.

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MARCH 23, 2020: Westport Museum for History & Culture launched *Westport In Focus* today, an online exhibit collaboration between the museum and Westport photographer, Jerri Graham. The exhibit which will be appear on social media platforms, will allow Westporters from all walks of life to tell their own stories about living in the Connecticut town considered “ground zero” for the Corona virus epidemic in the state.

The project can be viewed on **Instagram @WestportFocus** and **Facebook @WestportInFocus** and on the Museum's e-newsletter with signups on the home page of Museum website westporthistory.org.

“History happens every day and all around us,” said Ramin Ganeshram, Westport Museum, Executive Director. “Sometimes that fact is more apparent than at others in our lives but this is one of those times when it is crystal clear. Our hope is that we can record history for posterity and for the knowledge of future generations.”

Graham's brainchild, *Westport in Focus* marries the skill of the experienced portraitist with the curatorial and oral history expertise of the museum. The goal is to create a living history of the town's experience as “ground-zero” for Corona-Virus in Connecticut. Westporters—and those who work in Westport—are encouraged to participate and share their stories of living in this new and discomfiting reality.

“In an effort to remain connected as a community, our mission is to show our faces to our neighbors,” said Jerri Graham. “We can't forget who we are behind the closed doors during this pandemic. Partnering with Westport Museum to create a living history to be archived for future generations will demonstrate how we survived, thrived, and maintained our humanity as a town in this unprecedented time.”

Graham is United States Navy-trained professional photographer and the creative and business force behind the popular food brand Nothin' But granola. For twelve years she was a writer and editor, in Asia and the US. She's lived in Westport for 13 years where she has built a business as a portraitist who captures unique aspects of her subjects. Graham's recent exhibition *Hope Starts Here 2020* raised awareness and funds for Stage 4 Metastatic Breast Cancer through a partnership with AWARE, a local nonprofit that highlights a different charity each year.

“My father always emphasized the importance of telling a story through your images,” said Graham of her dad who owned his own medical lab where she grew up in Ohio and was also a dedicated amateur photographer. “His advice resonates more than ever right now and I consider it a duty to document this critical time in our town and nation’s history.”

The virtual living history exhibit has already garnered interest from those who want to mark special occasions or life events in a meaningful way now that social gatherings are discouraged. Others feel the project gives voice to feelings and concerns that are difficult to share. In all cases, participants have noted that the project allows them to feel connected to community.

The museum intends to continue this mode of oral history well after the immediate crisis has passed.

“Our intent is that this project will be the foundation of the museum’s new approach to the medium of oral history—one that uses visual storytelling and social media platforms to make an immediate connection with others now and tomorrow,” said Ganeshram

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ABOUT WESTPORT MUSEUM FOR HISTORY & CULTURE: The award-winning Westport Museum for History & Culture is a cultural center devoted to providing engaging, interactive interpretation of local history inclusive of all stories and all people. Located in beautiful downtown Westport, the Museum provides a variety of programming for people of all ages including an abundance of free events for the community to enjoy. From beloved yearly events such as Westport Is Your Oyster, an oyster and prosecco event; Spooktober, a full month of harvest and Halloween programming in October to the beloved Holly Days, an ecumenical December celebration for the holiday season to unique happenings from performances, lectures, readings and interactive activities, the Museum strives to present history in a fun, modern context. In the 2018/19 program year, as Westport Historical Society the Westport Museum for History & Culture received accolades, local and regional awards, and national award nominations for its ground-breaking exhibit *Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport*. Exhibits such as *Liberty To Set Down: Migrants and Immigrants in Westport Connecticut*, *Becoming Westport*, and 2020’s *Dragon Lady: The Life of Sigrid Schultz* explore various themes in American history through Westport’s own past. In March 2020, the Museum launched a Virtual Museum