



**A MONUMENTAL EXPERIENCE** – Ryan Booth, a La Conner High alum and Washington State University doctoral student who grew up on Swinomish Reservation, visited the famed Taj Mahal – the symbol of India’s rich history – while conducting research abroad as a Fulbright Scholar. Booth returned home recently in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

– Photo courtesy of Ryan Booth

## Ryan Booth back from India early due to COVID-19 crisis

By Bill Reynolds

It took a historic pandemic to cut short a La Conner High alum’s in-depth study of history in India.

Ryan Booth, now a doctoral student at Washington State University, saw his assignment as a Fulbright Scholar on the subcontinent cut short due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Fortunately, Booth had worked at a frenetic pace while researching comparisons and contrasts between the British Empire’s use of native Indians in its military and the U.S. Army’s enlistment of Native American scouts on the western frontier.

He worked ahead of schedule and had begun writing a chapter on his research project for a book to be published next year when the coronavirus threat struck.

“I’m very lucky since I was able to get all my research done in the seven months I was there,” Booth, who is scheduled to teach history at WSU-Vancouver in the fall, told the Weekly News last week. “I also took advantage of lots of travel to really see the country as much as possible.”

Booth said the prestigious Ful-

bright program is designed to promote both academic research and cultural interaction.

“I’m glad I had a chance to represent my country in both arenas,” he said.

The most memorable part of Booth’s experience in India was also the most haunting. It was his visit to the Cellular Jail at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.

“Most folks go to the Andamans for the pristine beaches,” Booth said, “but I wanted to see the prison where the British kept the political prisoners. It was a place of nearly unspeakable terror. The inmates mostly died from either capital punishment – by hanging – being worked to death or suicide.

“Very few Indians,” he said, “made it out of that jail alive.”

Most prisoners were sent to the island jail for having promoted independence from the British Empire.

“They wanted freedom and liberty,” Booth said. “I will never view the British Empire the same way again.”

When the COVID-19 threat intensified, the Fulbright Commission in India “strongly encour-

aged” its scholars to leave the country.

“I consulted with my family,” said Booth, “and they all wanted me home even though Washington state was ground zero at the time.”

Leaving wasn’t easy, logistical-ly or emotionally.

“The last week was very hard to get out of India,” he said. “Fulbright made the travel arrangements only to have the airlines cancel the flights. We went through three rounds of that before we finally got an itinerary that held.”

Booth was cleared to leave on March 18, thanks to Air India, the government-run airline.

“While all the private commercial airlines were canceling their flights, Air India remained one of the few keeping to schedules and flying around the world to pick up stranded Indian nationals,” said Booth. “They earned my eternal gratitude.”

Booth left behind many new friends and memories to last a lifetime.

“I will miss the fresh, inexpensive food,” Booth said. “I could get meals from one dollar. They were very delicious meals and always freshly made. India eats very little processed food, which is the American staple. I also became convinced that vegetarian and vegan food can taste delicious. We just don’t spice it up enough and make it palatable.”

COVID-19 may also affect Booth’s future in terms of his teaching post in Vancouver, just north of Portland.

“My main motivation was to have the chance to teach my own classes again,” he said. “Vancouver will offer me that chance and with smaller class sizes than Pullman. The introductory classes in Vancouver number between 30 and 40 students.

“Who knows, Booth speculated, “whether it will be face-to-face or on-line at this point, though. Let’s hope for the best.”

In a related note:

• La Conner High alum Nicole Henriksen, a WSU senior, told the Weekly News that her Peace Corps assignment to Malawi has been postponed until the coronavirus crisis has passed. She was to have begun her two-year mission in southeast Africa this summer. “If it (COVID-19) spreads through Malawi,” she said, “there can be chance it will be canceled.”

## Cunningham April’s Soroptimist Student

Chloe Cunningham has been chosen the Soroptimist International of La Conner chapter’s April’s Soroptimist Honored Student of the Month. This is the essay she submitted to the chapter:

My name is Chloe Cunningham. I’m 16 years old and a sophomore at La Conner High school. I’ve been attending La Conner Schools since kindergarten and have lived here my whole life. Many of you might know me as the person that collects socks for the homeless, through my company Just Say Socks. Volunteer work is something I’ve been drawn to ever since I was little. Growing up in the family I did, I’ve always been taught basic kindness and to never doubt my power as an individual. My parents have always encouraged me and my two sisters to discover what we feel passionate about and then jump in where we see a need.

I started my sock drive when I was in sixth grade, after I visited a homeless resource center in Seattle called Just Say Hello with my middle school leadership class (shout out to Mrs. Marble and Mrs. Lisser!). At Just Say Hello their focus is to create change by the way the homeless community is viewed. They supply people battling homelessness with tents, tarps, sleeping bags, clothes and hygiene supplies. While they support with immediate needs, they are not just a resource center. Just Say Hello works to create relationships with those living outside as well as to diminish stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness.

So much has changed since I first got involved with Just Say Hello but what will never change is how much my first experience impacted me. I used to think of the issue of homelessness as a whole. I felt like the issue was too big for me to help at all, but when you take a step back, instead of seeing one huge obstacle you see individuals: people struggling: human beings.

Just Say Hello taught me to never judge someone and about how everyone has a story. I’ve learned that it doesn’t take a lot to change someone’s life, as little as genuine human connection can impact someone. I knew I needed to share with anyone I could hoping I would be able to touch someone as Just Say Hello touched me. That is why I start-



CHLOE CUNNINGHAM

ed collecting socks. People living outside spend their lives on their feet and go through socks like crazy. The La Conner community has been so generous in helping me with my sock drive every year. I am also a giving partner with Bombas Sock Company and to date I have donated over 12,000 pairs of socks. Thank you, La Conner!

Currently it is a very difficult time for all of us. We are all impacted in ways that we never thought imaginable. Even though it is a time of isolation, we really are a part of the world in a bigger way. I encourage everyone to continue to help others less fortunate than ourselves. It is always important but even more now to help those most vulnerable.

Submitted by: Soroptimist International of La Conner

top ten

Egg-Producing States\*

1. Iowa
2. Indiana
3. Ohio
4. Pennsylvania
5. Texas
6. Georgia
7. North Carolina
8. Michigan
9. California
10. Arkansas

\* based on laying hens  
Source: Statista 2019

## School Board Director needed

The La Conner School District Board seeks applications from residents of District 2 for appointment to District 2 Director. District 2, described on the school district’s website, includes the Swinomish Reservation but is north of most of Shelter Bay. The term runs through 2023.

Interested citizens will include a statement with reasons for seeking appointment, a statement of philosophy regarding public education, complete a questionnaire and provide supporting documents. The position is open until filled. The first screening of applications will be April 16.

Applicants must be U.S. citizens, legal residents of Washington and registered to vote.

The application and supporting documents should be submitted

via mail or email to:

Dr. Whitney Meissner, Superintendent

PO Box 2103, La Conner, WA 98257

wmeissner@lc.k12.wa.us  
info: https://www.lcsd.wednet.edu/Page/1; 360-466-3171.



Moments  
in time

THE HISTORY CHANNEL

• On April 14, 1818, Noah Webster, a Yale-educated lawyer with an avid interest in language and education, publishes his American Dictionary of the English Language. Webster’s dictionary was one of the first to include distinctly American words, introducing more than 10,000 “Americanisms.”

• On April 13, 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is officially incorporated in New York City. The city stipulated that the collection be kept open to the public year-round and free of charge. The first object the Met acquired was a Roman sarcophagus.

• On April 16, 1881, on the streets of Dodge City, famous Western lawman and gunfighter Bat Masterson fights his last gun battle. He would live another 40 years. Masterson had his first shootout in 1876 in Texas over the affections of a dance hall girl named Molly Brennan.

• On April 19, 1897, John J. McDermott of New York wins the first Boston Marathon, a measured distance of 24.5 miles from the Irvington Oval in Boston to Metcalf’s Mill in Ashland. The marathon’s distance was changed in 1908 to its current length of 26 miles 385 yards.

• On April 17, 1945, U.S. Lt. Col. Boris T. Pash commandeers over half a ton of uranium at Strassfurt, Germany, in an effort to prevent the Soviets from developing an A-bomb. Pash headed a group searching for German scientists to prevent the Soviets from capturing them.

• On April 15, 1959, new Cuban leader Fidel Castro visits the United States. President Dwight Eisenhower, however, had no intention of meeting with the communist revolutionary and instead went to the golf course.

• On April 18, 1983, the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, is almost completely destroyed by a suicide car-bomb explosion that kills 63 people, including 17 Americans. The terrorist attack was carried out in protest of the U.S. military presence in Lebanon.

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## Kids Chamber Coloring Contest!

Keep your children occupied coloring the bridges, daffodils, tulips and farm fields of the Skagit Valley. The La Conner Chamber of Commerce wants entries from your families in two categories for its coloring contest: Ages 0-6 and 7-10.

“We created the coloring contest as a fun activity for children in our community,” explained Chamber Director Heather Carter in an email. She wants you to encourage your kids to “Imagine Spring in La Conner!”

A gift basket will be awarded for each age group

Entries will be accepted by mail and email until April 20.

Download <https://lovelaconner.com/wp-content/uploads/Imagine-Spring-Coloring-ShtFinal.pdf>.

Submit pictures to the La Conner Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center: La Conner Chamber, P.O. Box 1610, La Conner 98257 or email to [info@laconnerchamber.com](mailto:info@laconnerchamber.com)

Source: La Conner Chamber of Commerce