

Copy's Story

Interview and story written with Zichen Xu

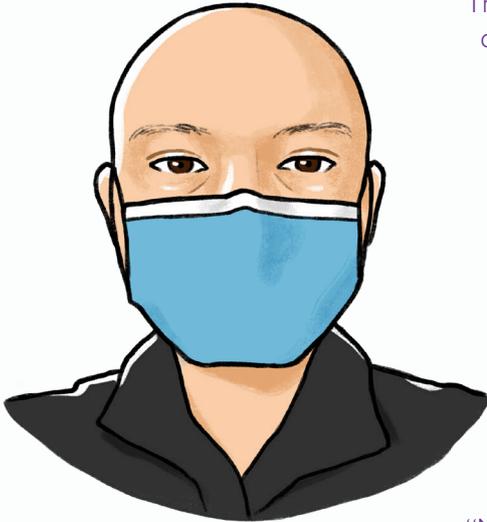


Illustration by Xue Xu. @yumigou_

Copy is a frontline worker in the construction industry

When the pandemic started, Copy's boss at the restaurant he worked at lied about the restaurant being closed for two weeks, as this two weeks became four weeks. Even with no work to do, Copy's boss would not let Copy return to his dormitory provided by the restaurant to get his luggage and belongings. After six months of delays, and seeing that the end of the pandemic was nowhere in sight, the boss allowed Copy to retrieve his luggage from the dormitory. Now, Copy stays home every day. In the beginning, this was comfortable for Copy because he had plenty of time to rest and catch up on TV shows. However, seeing restaurants, supermarkets, and other businesses suffer, Copy lost hope as the pandemic went on.

Concerned about his financial situation and feeling like staying at home wasn't an option, Copy decided to find temporary work in renovation. Copy said that temporary workers in renovation are the ones who take on the dirtiest and most tiring work.

They often need to demolish walls covered in dust, dispose of the most troublesome renovation debris and garbage, and take the foreman to and from work. They also need to prepare, in advance and for themselves, the mandatory protective equipment and meals for the job. The foreman often used insulting words to abuse employees and constantly threatened to fire them. Copy said:

"Now that restaurant, supermarket, and barber shop services have been cut down a lot, in addition to the fact that renovation workers are not public facing so the industry is relatively safe, everyone has flocked to work in the renovation industry. These renovation foremen are particularly arrogant. No matter how hard the work is and no matter how little you're paid, you have to abide by the foreman's every order; otherwise they'll curse at you or threaten to replace you. You have to do what you have to do to survive. Having some work is better than nothing."

"For example, when I had to change tiles, I had to kneel on the ground all day. When I got home, my knees were swollen, bruised, and bloody. I already felt dirty every day, but even then, I would be scolded. Furthermore, we would be on standby for 30 days a month, and the actual work only lasted 4-5 days."

It is unlike before the pandemic, when workers could go to restaurants close to their workplaces to buy food, which

would save the time it takes to prepare food at home. At the same time, Copy thinks that with the coming of spring, gardening, roofing, and other industries will start to open up, which may reduce competition among the workers and improve the situation for renovation workers.

"The pandemic has brought a lot of inconveniences. I'm too afraid to go to places like the family doctor, the hospital, and I'm afraid to use public transportation."

"The pandemic has slowed many things down and has even made things

"No matter how hard the work is and no matter how little you're paid, you have to abide by the foreman's every order, otherwise they'll curse at you or threaten to replace you."

impossible to do. I'm afraid to go and update my health card. I haven't been able to do a lot of things that I normally would." Copy expressed strong feelings of powerlessness about the problems he encountered in his life during the pandemic. Copy doesn't believe he can overcome them.

"Under certain conditions, I would especially want to return to China." "It feels like under the atrocious conditions of this pandemic, none of us can do anything. Like ants, the most we can do is change our mindset, adapt to these conditions, and wait for the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines to become widespread."

With the problems he has faced at work, Copy said that because he



Three images of an injury Copy sustained on his forearm. Photo by Copy.

couldn't stand the renovation foreman's bullying and exploitation, he reported to their boss and asked to resign.

Other colleagues who had similar experiences of being abused by the foreman came forward and spoke up for Copy. Not long after, the abusive foreman was dismissed.

Copy is very disappointed with the Canadian government's pandemic measures and with Canada's overall efforts to counter the pandemic. Copy believes that many people in Canada are generally unable to prevent and control the pandemic as effectively as people in China. Helplessly, Copy said: "The weirdest thing is that I once drove to get the mail during the lockdown, and got stuck in traffic on the highway... there were cars everywhere on the highway, as if there was no pandemic."

Copy believes that in Canada, it's difficult to reduce and restrict peoples' going out by having officers with authority in the community. In Canada, the solution to the pandemic depends only on vaccines. However, the vaccination rollout is extremely slow. Copy also believes that due to differences in national political systems and ideologies, people in Europe and

North America care too much about their so-called individual rights and freedoms, even during pandemic. He feels that people are seriously lacking in their sense of public and common good, and that the whole situation is worrying.

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“For example, when I worked in renovation, I once worked a job with local Canadians. All of them didn't wear masks, and even hugged and shook hands.”

“When I saw them hug and shake hands, I wanted to get as far away from them as possible. To protect myself from infection, I wore a mask for the whole day, and when it was time to eat or do anything, I kept a big distance between us.”

Regarding the government's pandemic

measures, Copy hopes that the Canadian government can adopt approaches similar to those of the Chinese government. Rather than distributing money on a large scale, it would be better to use the money to hire volunteers and let these volunteers block and restrict peoples' outings and gatherings, and to expand the density and scale of disinfection sprinklers and helicopters.

Copy believes that if the government could implement these measures for a month, the pandemic would be over. At the same time, Copy knows that these measures would be difficult to implement in Canadian society.

In this situation, Copy feels a deep sense of helplessness. In any case, Copy hopes that everyone, especially those outside of the Asian community, can act in everybody's common interest and reduce their outings, wear masks frequently, and that the government increases their pandemic measures wherever possible. Copy believes that this is the only way we can all see the end of this pandemic.