

Virus, kids, dunes, Oregon – a story about the random mix of life

by Joana Gaspar de Freitas

In times of Corona virus, kids stay at home watching us work. One of these days, mine asked me:

“- Mom, how do you pick your dunes? There are so many!!”

This is an interesting question. It may not be very scientific, but often case-studies just pop up – as so many other things in life – randomly. A talk with a colleague, a walk in a beach, an image on TV, a document in the archives. Any clue can be a good clue to make me want to know more, curiosity lead the research.

In the last months I have been working about the dunes of Oregon (US). The idea first come from the *The Guardian*, from a news that explained how the best sci-fi book ever written – *Dune* -, by Frank Herbert, had been inspired by the works to fix the dunes of Florence, in the Pacific Coast. Herbert visit the region, in 1957, being amazed by what he saw. That landscape took him to write a fiction book about a planet that is, in fact, a giant dune. Later, in summer 2019, in a congress, in Brazil, an American colleague, hearing the description of my project, said that Oregon, where he lives, has amazing dunes and that I should study them. It has a serendipity moment - a connection has made in my mind, putting me in the right track for a good story.

Since then I have been collection information about the works of the Department of Agriculture in Florence, to understand what Frank saw. Where do I find it? In digital archives. For instance, the University of Oregon has a great online database of old newspapers, since 1846. I have read some looking for descriptions of the dunes, the problems they caused and the strategies used to prevent them from drifting. When I got all the material that I needed, I start joining the pieces of the puzzle about the dunes, to be able to write their history. A narrative about Herbert's book, Florence and the works to stop the moving sand, connecting fiction, history and science about the Oregon's dunes. You can read it one of these days, when it gets published!