The meme “How It Started/How It’s Going/How It Ended” has been named the #DigitalTrendoftheYear by student and faculty researchers at USU’s Digital Folklore Project. “A meme that shows a picture of flowers captioned ‘How It Started’ next to a photo of a nuclear bomb captioned ‘How It Ended,’ seems to be the perfect meme to sum up how so many of us feel about 2020,” said Jeannie Thomas, who co-directs the project with Lynne McNeill. Both McNeill and Thomas are folklorists in USU’s Department of English.

The “How It Started” Twitter meme initially focused on romantic relationships, but users rapidly employed it to comment on everything from career achievements to fitness goals to gender transitions to the presidential election—and, of course, COVID-19.

McNeil said, “It makes sense that a trend that lets us all comment on the year we’ve had in both fun and serious ways was the most significant in 2020.”

Each year folklore students at Utah State University track digital trends. They then meet at the end of the year to prepare a ballot that goes out to a national panel of experts in digital folklore, which selects the winning trend.