



AN ANTHOLOGY

WHAT WAS & WHAT WILL BE

Life in the Time of COVID-19

EDITED BY BARBARA SHOUP

Introduction

Since 2014, the Indiana Writers Center, Dance Kaleidoscope, JCC Indianapolis, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and others have partnered to present a program for the annual Spirit and Place Festival, bringing writers and dancers together to explore an issue of importance to our community. This year, the issue was obvious—and “What It Was and Will Be” was born.

When Covid-19 hit this spring, nobody’s life was untouched by it. We pared our lives down to the necessities and sheltered in the best way we could. Sometimes we were surprised by what we *didn’t* need, sometimes by what we missed (and how much we missed it.) We celebrated birthdays and graduations with drive-by parties; Zoom cocktail hours kept us in touch. We mourned our losses without the comfort of loved ones surrounding us. We wondered if it would ever end.

Whether the personal consequences of the virus have been tragic or just deeply disorienting, we’ve all had moments of fear, anxiety, anger, grief, and frustration, as well as moments of happiness, insight, and even joy. Living through this strange time has been different for each of us—yet, in many ways, the same.

We asked Hoosiers to write about their experiences during this time, challenging them to think about what being quarantined has been like, what they learned about themselves, others, the world we share. We asked them to tell us how time feels when the world suddenly shrinks, and how they’ve been spending that time. We asked them to imagine how their lives will be different when, finally, the pandemic is over.

“The horror of that moment,” the king went on, “I shall never forget it!”

“You will,” the Red Queen thought, “if you don’t make a memorandum of it.

Lewis Carol, Alice in Wonderland

Like the king, we think we’ll never forget what it was like to live through the 2020 Pandemic. But the Red Queen was right. Memories fade over time and we find ourselves grasping for details from bygone days. So, it’s important to write our stories down—for ourselves and for our families, of course, but also to contribute to the historical record of our times.

Letter writing has become a lost art; thus, future historians will be denied the riches of ordinary life they have traditionally conveyed. I think of the pieces in this anthology as letters waiting to be discovered years from now by those who want to understand what

life was like during COVID 19. Maybe because they're curious; maybe because they're living through a pandemic themselves and are looking for guidance.

And imagine them discovering the ancient YouTube video of beautiful dances choreographed by Dance Kaleidoscope dancers, visual interpretations of ten stories read by their authors!

I hope you will enjoy reading the responses to the pandemic in *What It Was and Will Be*. To encourage you to write about your own experience, we have added a list of prompts at the end of the anthology, as well as several exercises guaranteed to help you get your memories on the page. If you'd like what you write to be included in an addendum to this online anthology, please send them to spiritandplace@indianawriters.org.

And be sure to watch the online performance of "What It Was and Will Be." The video will go live at 2 p.m. on Sunday, November 8. It will be available for viewing through Sunday, November 22 at 5 p.m. [Here's the link:](#) (NOT AVAILABLE UNTIL 11.7)

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Mexican Independence Day Parade: A Family Tradition

Emiliano Aguilar

Amidst countless Zoom calls and changed plans, I must admit that COVID has also left me nostalgic. Growing up part Mexican, I looked forward to attending the yearly festivities during Latina/o Heritage Month, which runs September 15th to October 15th. Across the United States, many communities reflect on the diverse region that is Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as those members of their community that trace their heritage to the region.

As a multiracial boy from Northwest Indiana, the *Fiestas Patrias* celebrations allowed me an opportunity to connect with a part of my family, as well as my heritage. However, amid the fears of COVID, this Mexican Independence Day was just not the same. For decades, my hometown of East Chicago in Northwest Indiana held an Independence Day Parade on the Sunday before the birth of an independent Mexico. In 2020, there would be no such parade.

For my entire life, this parade was a yearly occasion. My mother would herd her three, and later four, children from our home on the North Side to the Harbor for the parade. Every year we would find a spot along Columbus Boulevard between Dairy Queen and the McDonalds. Some years we had friends join us. From our spot we watched as countless floats drove past toward Block Stadium, where the festival was held.

As a child, I was admittedly more interested in rushing out to catch the candy thrown out than the displays of my Mexican heritage. I would stuff my pockets with Jolly Ranchers and Nerds, even the occasional chocolate, but never a Tootsie Roll. However, as I got older, I noticed the long array of floats and participants in the parade. Traditional *charros* galloped down the packed streets in the former steel city. *Gritos* of “Viva Mexico” joined the blaring music from low-riders. When the parade ended at Block Stadium, bands belted out *corridos* and *música norteña* from near home plate of the baseball diamond. The aromas of fresh tacos *de pastor* and *elotes* filled the air. A childhood friend’s grandfather owned Lopez Hermanos Western Wear and they would set up a tent to sell traditional apparel. Not a year would go by where my friends, and even my family, would remind me that my head was too big to buy any of the palm leaf hats.

However, this year marked the third time in the city’s history where the parade, and subsequent festival was cancelled. I barely remember the last time the annual parade was cancelled. That was just days after 9/11. The first cancellation was in 1942, as residents across the United States rationed to contribute to the war effort. Since 1926,

the community in this industrial town celebrated their roots and culture. The festival wasn't just an opportunity to snatch up candy. For me, it was a family tradition. Before I was even born, the parade was already a part of my family's story. Although the parade was cancelled amid the COVID19 pandemic, it offered a time to remember. A few years ago, my Tia Rose, Tia Argentina, and I spent several hours looking through a bin of old photographs from their childhood. Over a few beers, they began to reminisce over training for the pageants, going to the social events, and the parades. I left my Aunt's home that evening with a plastic grocery bag full of photos. With the parade this year cancelled, I went back through those photos (and kicked myself for not recording their comments when we drunkenly looked through the stacks of pictures.)

My grandfather, Francisco Aguilar, came to the Harbor to find work at Inland Steel. As he became adjusted to life in Indiana, he joined the city's *mutualista* the Union Benefica Mexicana, or U.B.M. When my grandmother would go south for the winter, family members would bring my grandfather a meal to the U.B.M.'s bar. If I was lucky, I would get to tag along on these trips.

Early on, my grandfather insured that the parade became a continued tradition for the family. One year, my Tias Rose and Argentina, my cousin Aurelio, and I rode on the All-American Pawn float. I remember being so upset that year that I would not be able to stuff my pockets with candy.

Last year, I held a banner that read "Stop Gary Deportations Now" and walked with NWI Resist. My partner spent months with their fellow activists building papier-mache models of famous Black and Brown individuals with the theme of their float being Interracial Solidarity. We marched next to a traditional dance group through the downtown region and blocks that were part of the community's first families.

It is hard to imagine a world right now where something like the parade would be possible. Imagining thousands of people lining the parade route and hundreds more marching through the streets just seems like such a distant memory today. As Latinas and Latinos are one of the hardest demographics hit by the COVID19 Pandemic in some states, it is important to remember that even in tough moments in the past, there was always hope. In six short years, our community will celebrate one hundred years of festivities. Until then, we can continue to ask our elders, share our stories, and explore old photo albums. There will be more to come.

Pleasure Boating in the Apocalypse

Caelea Armstrong

March 1: 19 dead, 75 infected.

Schools closing and going electronic meant I could sleep in a bit later but quarantining with a mentally ill 18-year-old made me reluctant to get out of bed. My oven broke on the first day of the stay-at-home order. I woke up with a sore throat and a runny nose. With a few Lysol wipes left, I started bleaching doorknobs and light switches and faucets daily. In the beginning, I washed my hands so frequently they were cracked and flaking. After e-learning each day, I sewed facemasks from old shirts that only a few weeks ago, I wore to school. I worry about my parents staying in Boise with my sister. Does everyone have everything they need? I am aware of the food and cleaner and TP shortages, so I nervously inventoried mine. To cope with a niggling unease, I scrolled through Zillow listings in places I would like to live. Anxiety level = 5.

April 1: 5,000 dead. 220,000 infected.

I spent my days in front of a laptop hunched over on the living room couch, shoulders aching, about 30 tabs open, distractedly going from email to research sites to daily press briefings. Horrified by stories out of New York, I searched for articles or videos on survivors, only to learn that survival often brought a new layer of suffering. Days were punctuated with pleasant and increasingly lengthening dog walks to stretch out my spine and my cramping legs. I so missed the pool. I missed the high of a workout. Trying to do my part to support restaurants while also appreciating the daily outing, I ate better than ever. My pants became snug. I know I am out of shape. Walking, alone, isn't enough. The consequences of going to bed with Zillow were that I had an offer on a home in Michigan and now my house was on the market...during a global pandemic. I was down to three rolls of toilet paper. Anxiety level = 6

May 1: 66,000 dead. 1,130,000 infected.

Everything pertaining to senior year had been cancelled, and to add insult to injury, my home sold, so SHE has to move again. Guilt and Relief are warring in my soul, while the misery and drama in my home intensifies. I brood. I try to pack. My car broke down. She spent an evening cutting herself. My cousin crashed at my place for a few days because she was sick, so I took care of her. The Ahmaud Arbery video floods the news each night. I feel sad and restless and tired. But I am still eating like a queen. My parents drove from Boise to Chicago in 4 days, taking the northernmost route. I am so

happy to see them, but being in the most vulnerable demographic, I am scared for their safety. Several wonderful people help me move, one of them critiquing everything from the contents of my refrigerator to my choices in clothing. In the middle of it, the foster has a meltdown, so I pause for a few hours to help get her settled. Anxiety level = licking doorknobs.

June 1: 107,000 dead. 1,870,000 infected.

The cousin in the above paragraph tells me off and leaves. It's a punch to the gut. The former foster kid calls to tell me she tested positive for COVID, and so I self-quarantine.

She wants me to drive her to a grad party in Indy. I tell her no. I am overwhelmed by boxes and clutter and judgment, but I slowly plug away at unpacking. My brother-in-law hooks me up with wifi and a new TV, which I put in the basement because I really don't want to watch TV anymore. The world erupts again when the video of George Floyd hits the evening news. Even my little town has a march, but chaos reigns elsewhere. I think I have "outrage fatigue." I've stopped asking what next. I am thankful to have a job and still be eating good food every day, but I feel numb. My dad turned 70 and was gifted a kidney stone, and all of my siblings arrive, nervously, for the 4th. We've cleaned and sanitized. At first, we are afraid to hug. Anxiety level = 8.5

July 1: 127,000 dead. 2,780,000 infected.

The tree trimmer told me that three, massive, 100 year old maples in my yard are hollow and full of ants. As much as I want it, they cannot be saved. I accepted their deaths, but I could not watch. On the morning of the 4th, I drove my Dad to the ER. He ended up in emergency surgery and the ICU with sepsis while I sweated in the hospital parking lot waiting on an update. I was told that if we had waited a few more hours, he wouldn't have made it. I spent the night googling septic shock and kidney failure and the next week calling the hospital every 6 hours. We were not allowed to see each other. No one from the hospital called. Missing each other was torture. The Diamond Lake sandbar party made the world news as a reason why we can't have nice things. My sisters extended their vacations but worked remotely, so I babysat. Morning walks with the dog were sacred, a silent prayer to build me up for the rest of the day's tasks of calling, writing down nurses' names, questioning doctors, feeling helpless, playing with babies, feeling a weight in my chest. I am exhausted but sleepless at night, twisting in a sweaty helplessness. Dad was released, but there were strings attached, literally. And we go home, so grateful to be alive and together, to my new house in a forest (minus three trees) on a lake, and a new and strange normal involving painkillers and antibiotics and renal diets and straining urine out of a bag through a sieve evolves. Regis Philbin died.

John Lewis died. Joe Kernan died. Herman Cain died. My school announced that the year would start virtually, and I don't think my brain can handle any more. Anxiety level 10+

August 1: 151,000 dead. 4,760,000 infected. 2,000,000 have recovered.

One blue-sky morning recently, I swam across the lake with my brother-in-law. A warm breeze ruffled across water so clear that I could see a forest of seaweed in a cool, dark, quiet world stretching below me. My arms burned and my chest burned, but I curled up in the comfort of it like a long-lost friend. As the island came into focus, the rhythmic breathing, a soothing metronome, assured me of what I was still capable of doing...swimming...enduring...getting from point A to point B. After reaching the island, we crawled up the ladder and onto the pontoon and sprawled out on sun-warmed seats as my sister drove us to the sandbar (the same one mentioned in July). Snacking on pineapple and watermelon, we made plans to rig the Hobie later that day and sail. We had the lake to ourselves, 1040 acres of sparkling, cool waters and a breeze and soul-healing sunlight, and for a few hours, not a care in the world. Where was this pandemic? What country? It must be really hard for them. It all seemed so far away.

A Litany of Lists

By Jennifer Bostian

I am a list maker. Planning out each day with a list is like donning a suit of armor: I'm prepared for any battle the day brings. As things are checked off that list, I feel a great sense of accomplishment, as if I've won the battle. But when the pandemic swirled in, whisking away so many things that were on my list and depositing a jumble of other unexpected items, I was derailed. Grasping for control, I began making multiple lists—on any paper I could find. Lists in several different notebooks, lists on scraps of paper, lists on receipts, lists on my children's homework, lists in my mind. Lists of things to do, things to discuss, things to remember, things to purchase, things to experience, things to read, things to write. Lists for me, lists for my kids, lists for my husband—which he doesn't even know about. Lists about lists. It got really bad when those lists in my head started to slip out my mouth—like recently, as we prepared to drop off our oldest daughter at college for the first time.

Whenever I said anything to her that last week, she cranked at me like a rusty wagon. (*Nature's way of preparing for her departure*, I told myself. *Let it go.*) Then, I discovered that she still had not completed all her thank you notes. Many people had mailed graduation gifts since they could not attend her party in person due to the pandemic. It was especially important that she send acknowledgement of those gifts.

"Fine," I said, "I'll just finish them myself and sign your name!"

"You're not helping me, Mom—you're stressing me out!" But it spurred her to finish them. Not exactly how I wanted to spend our last night with her. Instead of the fun, relaxing evening I'd envisioned, I had to hurdle piles of her unpacked things. Piles to match each one of my lists and then some: piles of towels and bedding in the living room, piles of toiletries and cleaning supplies in the front room, piles of face masks and clothes in the laundry room, piles of snacks on the kitchen counter, piles of clothes, supplies, books and photos in her room, piles of bags and packing supplies everywhere. My cheeks burned and my pulse quickened. I was dizzy from all the piles.

She's going to be at this all night, I thought. So, I started stuffing piles into bags. My husband grumbled that it was her job. True, but things weren't getting checked off the list fast enough, and I was a jittery mess. Eventually, we sifted through the piles and lists and crammed everything into the U-Haul trailer we rented. We got up early the next morning to face the 3-hour drive to her "perfect fit" college.

As we drove, my mind buzzed with yet another list—things I forgot to do: one last family portrait, pictures of her with her cap and gown—in front of all the schools she attended, a long walk/run together (mini-marathon style since we’ve done two together), a picture of her in front of her finished mural, and a host of serious conversations. More traumatic were the things that would never get checked off the list because of the pandemic and the extra worries because of it. (We knew there would be no sporting events at her college, no parent weekends, limited traveling off campus for her and limited on campus visits for us. But I wondered if there would be clubs and activities to engage her. Would her classes change to be solely virtual if the positive cases continue to rise? Would she have plenty of social opportunities?)

Even though we’ve had 18 years to prepare for this moment, I was blindsided. Is there ever enough time? Yes, in those moments when she drives me nuts: when she’s moody, blatantly ignores our rules, forgets to do her chores, hoards our dishes in her room (with hardened flecks of food), stays up past 2:00 AM and sleeps past noon—all those moments make it easier to let go. But there is not one list on the face of this Earth that can really help me prepare for this moment.

Suddenly, as we drove on in silence, it all became too much. The things left undone on my list mounted, intermingling with the list of things yet to come that I might still have control over. My list of worries and regrets grew until my list of things I could perhaps still control began to seep out of my head and dribble out my mouth.

“Don’t forget to take your medicine and vitamins,” I said, without even realizing it at first. “And drink plenty of water.”

“OK, Mom!”

“Keep your dirty face masks separate from the clean ones. Put the dirty ones in the mesh bag to go in the laundry and the clean ones in the small gray basket. Maybe there will be a shelf for you to put it on.”

I could feel the hot air from the back seat as she exhaled, but I could not stop the list from spewing out.

“Get to bed early so that you get plenty of sleep. Oh and...”

“Can we have some music please?” she asked.

My husband popped in one of her favorite CD's: "Mamma Mia" and just like that, my verbal litany ended.

Deflated, I sucked in my breath, slowly exhaled and closed my eyes.

The drive went by quickly. Our youngest two children and I watched as my husband escorted our oldest (both masked) to the COVID testing line that snaked around the campus courtyard. It felt more like students were being herded into a concentration camp or prison rather than being dropped off for college. Especially since students had to remain quarantined in their dorms until the results came back 48 hours later. Positive results meant spending two weeks alone in a special quarantined dorm. Although we felt confident that the results would be negative, I fretted. *What if her test was positive, inconclusive or the results took longer than everyone else's to process?* The thought of her alone in unfamiliar surroundings haunted me.

It took about thirty minutes for them to make their way through the line, and then it was time to unpack the van. Only one parent at a time was allowed into the dorm so my husband and I took turns unloading boxes. Two of her roommates were already there and getting settled. We exchanged awkward, muffled greetings through our face masks. We tried arranging her boxes, but her bedroom was cramped. I wanted to help her do a few things but then her third and final roommate came in and suddenly there was no room for me. We weren't encouraged to stay long due to the Pandemic anyway. As we exchanged goodbyes, it felt as if things were left unfinished, words unsaid. Hollowness swelled in the pit of my stomach.

All the way home, my brain zoomed with doubt. *Did we adequately prepare her for this next step? Will she keep in touch with us? Did we do our best? Was our best good enough? Will she be happy? Will she thrive? Will she make healthy, lasting friendships?*

Within an hour, she texted - "We forgot to pack the "H".

It was one of my handmade graduation gifts to her. I had created a collage of pictures from the last four years and pasted them on a wooden H, her first initial. It was the perfect thing to bridge this transition and make her feel at home in her dorm. Somehow it never made my list or her pile.

"I'll mail it, no problem," I replied. But it made me wonder what else we'd forgotten. For the rest of the evening, I attempted to dispel the sense of failure that loomed by busying myself with idle conversations, reading books, making more preparations, more lists.

“Mom,” came another text later that night along with a photo of her room. “My roommates and I got everything unpacked and pictures hung up. We’re just hanging out now. Thanks for helping me. Love you!”

Right then the first tears of the day spilled down my face.

There will always be things that get checked off my lists as well as things left undone, things forgotten. But just then I knew we did the best we could, with mounds of love and passion. That is more than just good enough. That is the most important thing I have ever checked off of any list.

Cut Me Off

Jennifer Bostian

Each day is a vinyl record, scratched beyond repair – stuck in the same spot, skipping the same lyrics over and over. With all our spring activities, events and parties cancelled, frustrations escalate. Our new normal of being cooped up day after day with the same five people—including one teen and twin tweens (all girls)—creates a kind of electrical charge. Even though we love each other deeply and normally get along great, too much togetherness can be toxic, even for the best of friends. Within several weeks of quarantine, I just want to pick up that broken record, fling it across the room and watch it smash to bits against the wall.

I am a social introvert. I work from home partly because I NEED some peace and solitude each day. Quiet time to create. Quiet time to reflect. Quiet time to regenerate. Now with all five of us home 24/7, my mind is a swirling mess. I fantasize about my old life—the one with hours of calm and quietude. The one where I could actually think and carry out a task without interruptions. The reality now is that someone is always talking—especially when someone else is trying to concentrate. Someone is always chomping too loudly on a snack. Especially when someone else is trying to study or take a test. Someone else is always humming or whistling or practicing an instrument, especially when someone else is trying to conduct a conference call or Zoom session. I am no different than my kids—I go to put the clean dishes away and get a scowl from my husband because he is on a conference call and apparently the clanks and clinks are interfering.

One day, the kids are all huddled around the kitchen table, working on their school assignments. Even though each has their own cozy area to work, they somehow end up all crammed into the same space—as close to me as possible. I'm preparing dinner in the kitchen when I smell the first whiff of smoke.

“Could you stop chewing like a cow?” the oldest one asks of her younger sibling, exaggeratedly mimicking the smacking sounds.

I try to snuff it with a warning glance—like sprinkling a little water on a spark before it combusts. But my glance goes unseen.

“Ok fine. I'll stop eating.” The younger fires a glare at her sister. “I'll just starve to death.”

I try the cut-off motion with my hand across my neck. But my gestures – the seriousness of my threats—go unfelt.

“You don’t have to be so dramatic!” The oldest throws her arms up in the air, her voice boiling like the tea kettle on the stove. “Chew with your mouth closed!”

The third one chimes in. “I’m working on my project, and I can’t concentrate!”

Clearly, my nonverbal communication is ineffective. So, I plead with each child. But my demands go unheard. Their banter continues, all three voices rising over mine, over each-others’. I can practically smell smoke, practically feel the stinging in my throat and chest as my pulse quickens and my face burns. My own voice crescendos, more accented than before, struggling to be heard. But the effect is like adding gasoline, propelling the fire. It’s as if they are trapped in a burning building, and they rely on their wails to deliver them to safety. I can’t even escape to another room at this point because to do so would be to ruin dinner. Although, because I can’t concentrate, I cannot recall if I’ve measured that last cup of flour. And did I add the baking soda? Perhaps dinner is already ruined.

Later, when things are calm, I hold a meeting. We discuss how constantly being together presents its challenges. We talk about our disappointments, confusion and fears related to the quarantine and virus. We talk about effective techniques for communicating and how to react when someone offends. They appear to hear me and talk about how they will handle things the next time.

But day after day, these fires continue to ignite. Somehow, I’m unprepared for each flare, and my responses are never effective. I find myself yelling at the first sign of discord, even when there may be legitimate tears. Because I just can’t handle the cacophony anymore. Late at night, when it’s finally quiet, guilt consumes me, sabotaging my chance for peaceful slumber. My mind whirls with thoughts of remorse, and my stomach churns with anxiety. I want desperately for all of us to make the most of this situation. To one day, look back on this time as positive and memorable...not as the mad house it currently is. I know a change has to be instilled for the mental and physical health of everyone. So, I cook up a scheme.

The next time I see a spark, I forge ahead with my plan.

“Stop whistling!” An angry voice shoots at a target.

“I can’t help it!” The target fires back.

I jump up from my chair, I open my mouth wide and in the loudest voice I sing, “You’re

not gonna fight. No, you're not gonna fight!" (to the tune of Twisted Sisters' "We're Not Gonna Take It").

By beat three of my musical interlude, their eyes bulge, their mouths are agape. It's as if I had pulled out the fire extinguisher and doused those flames. For a few seconds anyway.

"Come on, Mom, stop!" They turn on me, their forces suddenly united.

"You're not gonna fight anymore!" I sing louder and start dancing—exaggerated, crazy movements like a drunk woman on the dance floor of a bar.

"Ok, Mom, CUT IT OUT!"

But I don't stop. My frustrations, disappointments, and guilt tumble out as my voice gets even louder, my movements more dramatic. I know this isn't a pretty sight – I'm not trained in singing or dancing. And I don't claim to have any raw talent whatsoever. I'm nearly tone deaf and have the flexibility of a stick. I can hear the creaking of limbs increasing each day, threatening to snap rather than bend. But these obstacles don't thwart my passion, and I continue to make a twirling, trilling fool of myself.

"You aren't even singing the right words," my oldest says.

When it becomes clear that no amount of groaning or begging on their end can impede my display, the girls roll their eyes and scurry away like beetles to their own spaces. I am left alone to savor my restored peace.

My new approach seems to be working great. I have a varied repertoire ranging from rock 'n roll and pop tunes from the 60's to present, a bit of country and, on especially rough days, I even try imploring assistance from The Almighty with some Gospel songs.

One day, the three girls and I are hiking on a wooded trail near our home. One of the twins has begun writing poetry during this pandemic. While in the midst of our walk, she is speaking when her twin interrupts her (which is often the case). Immediately, as if on cue, twin #1 begins to recite her most recent poem, inspired by and dedicated to her twin:

"Cut me off. Cut me off like you want to.

Cut me off like you always do.

Cut me off because you can.

Why?

Cut m---”

These words, so simple yet so powerful move me, and I’m suddenly inspired to belt these words into soulful song, right there on the path. My oldest daughter, instead of being embarrassed or disgusted, begins to sing harmony. The other two add a vocal counter melody, thumping out alternative rhythms on their thighs. No eye rolls, no grunts of dismay, no scurrying away. Just the four of us singing an impromptu tune, our voices blending as if we’d been doing this for years together. What has started as a moment of discontent morphs into a bonding moment for all of us.

Ever since that day, my daughter’s poem set to simple melody resonates with me in such a profound and global way. The words ring true: the pandemic cuts us off in many ways—from social and work activities, from travel and recreation, from academic and sporting events, in some cases from treasured peace and solitude, and even from those who have died as a result of being afflicted. Experiences, activities and lives cut off, severing families, friends and a nation. Just maybe that record isn’t scratched beyond repair. Maybe it can be buffed out. Maybe our music and words can dance together, binding us, helping us to deal with this strange, unprecedented time.

You return to movies for the first time during the national solitude
Michael Brockley

It is a time to do penance for having never taken the journey to Zenith with Sister Falconer, for never having driven the getaway car beside a femme fatale with a loaded gun. Once a week you spend an hour talking with a woman who has Heaven tattooed on the back of her left shoulder. When she asks you to join the angels who guard the flawed folks of a bombed city, you say yes. You always say yes. How many times in these months have you hoped that Thelma and Louise survive the cliff? How often have you wished you were a man like Elmer Gantry? You don't know how to throw a punch or fire a gun. One night you walk away from your mother into a world where cops beat the men they arrest. You sing "I'm on My Way" for the first time. Country stomp while Delmar yodels "I'm in the Jailhouse Now" as the man with a guarantee from the crossroads picks guitar strings for his life. You begin to watch women wrest power from dithering men as aliens are jettisoned into space, and the woman who suffered coffee scald lures her felon to his killer. You learn that your friend scorns van Gogh, but shares your interest in road stories, in black-and-white flicks where everyone is a sinner. Tonight both of you plan to beat a drum so a flimflam man can make rain.

An Aubade at the Threshold of Loneliness

Michael Brockley

The last time I spoke with the Earth, I finished a Muddy Irishman at a coffee shop across from middle America's waterfalls. Shelley bought scones, and we sat in a sunlit corner eating our pastries while high school girls lounged on refurbished sofas where they took turns reading to each other from *the god of small things* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Shelley and I had walked a two-mile path beside the White River, turning back when we came to a floodplain beneath a railroad trestle. It was mid-March, the end of history, and the spring flowers had not yet blossomed. No, it was an agnostic's morning that held the promise of rare bird sightings. Orioles. Or grosbeaks. All of us dreamed of falling men then. In the coffee shop the young readers whispered about women who bend love to their will. In their slender voices *hurricane* and *love laws* became sacramental. The next day, I began a preoccupation with my wallflower escapades from high school by littering new poems with Rolling Stones rumors. The grosbeaks never perched on the serviceberry in the coffee shop patio on that Ides of March. I had yet to begin texting Shelley about my *tsundoku* lifestyle, my clutter of unread books. About the bears that walk upright through my neighborhood at night. About my penchant for losing track of time. On the way home, driving toward a bachelor routine of quarantine sandwiches, I wondered about the odds of *blessing* and *blossom* sharing a common root.

**When the children gather for a parable in the ruins of a bomb-hollowed church,
Michael Brockley**

you tell them how you emerged from dreams about brunettes who always said no. About asking your brother to nominate the most overrated player in baseball. Derek Jeter or Nolan Ryan, perhaps. You offered those first basemen who toiled for the Reds, the ones with warning track power who could coax a meaningless walk from a closer with the winning run on third. During these conversations your sister enlightened you about the industrial secrets that savored the flavor of pecan sandies. About the cul-de-sac neighborhoods hidden behind the mansions in your hometown. You rambled to yourself for hours in those solitary times on the origin of dark Santas until somehow you came to believe that *saunter* referred to *La Sainte Terre*. The Holy Land. Once upon a time there was a word for deliberately getting lost on a walk. A person who strayed from the road then could count on serendipity. You tell the children you planted Mexican sunflowers during that last summer and mourned dragonflies. You taught yourself to carry history's humility. Read too many books about the national sin. For months you covered your mouth and nose with a bandana printed with the titles of banned books. When the children grow restless from your monologue, you tell them a tycoon, a lickspittle, and a pauper walked into a pie shop. Before the trio left, the rich man swallowed the entire pie by himself. You ask the children to guess what kind of pie the rich man ate.

Puzzling Times

Mary Brown

We drag out a puzzle
 that has been lazing on a closet
shelf longer than we can
 remember—not our normal
pastime, but these are not
 normal times. The box top
shows all kinds of clocks—
 alarms and cuckoos, wall
and tower clocks, clocks
 with ordinal numbers, Roman
numerals, shapes in places
 where numbers should be,
twelve, three, six, nine, hands
 and faces sometimes over-
lapping, intertwined, pocket
 watches nesting on mantle
clocks—so many timepieces
 all showing different hours, ticks.
We play it by the book, look
 for corners, edges, color blocks.
You'd think it would be easy
 for pieces to find their mates,
males into females, tips dipped
 in olive green able to feel
their places on the grandfather
 clock. But unpracticed, we are slow
to see, to know, grow anxious, weary
 when a piece mocks every
effort toward communion: let's just
 have done with it, get it over with
and on to things that matter, *mean*. But now
 somehow, when by the miracle
of time and luck we start to see it come
 together, faces filling in and spaces
disappearing, we rally,
 sense a shift in values,
attitude. We kiss and sigh

with satisfaction, pride. Even before we finish
we know we will. We have
met the challenge, enjoyed some small
victory, connected, passed some time.

Tell me
Mary Brown

the baby was born. Tell me
her name, Violet Mae. Tell me
the calla lilies are up, the cannas too,
and a lovely mess of greens. Tell me
you found the opal ring I thought I'd
lost forever, the one my father gave me
when I turned 13, found it right there under
the bed, its stone a tiny full moon. Tell me
there's a letter from Aunt Beth in the mail,
inked in blue, heart, heart, heart across its
seal. Let me know the road has reopened,
potholes repaired, lines repainted, white
as pages waiting to be read. Tell me
the despot has been removed from office,
the insurrection peaceful, quick. Tell me
the riots are over, the streets quiet, fitless
sleep returned to the elderly, teenagers
eager and calm as honey. Tell me
the tumor has shrunk, the treatment
working, that you have hummingbirds
at your feeder, that little Leo is learning
to play the violin. Let me know the sun
is out, the ground still moist enough
to grow lush grass, sustain the green
promises we've been made. Tell me
any of this, all of this, whatever you
can give me with joy as its engine.

Bring me some good news soon:
whatever you can tell me will do.

Dreaming During the Pandemic

Mary Brown

Mornings we share our dreams, since we have no place to be during lockdown and sleep has courted and embraced our imaginations, produced many offspring. Early on he told me about dreaming he was contracted by India to write them a national song about the River Aldi, relief coming to his dream self only when he realized the possibilities of the rhyme with “Baldy.” I recounted to him one where I was acquainted with a family of dogs whose fur was comprised of variously colored dingle balls, the kind stitched to the bottoms of old-fashioned curtains. When I questioned the owners as to whether the dingles were glued to the dogs as costume, they were incensed and threatened to sue me for defamation of their dogs’ characters. When we tell each other these dream stories, we laugh, and the pandemic seems far from us, our home a safe and happy place.

Some of the dream-sharing is more somber, his late mother visiting him in the night, asking that he think about how he hurt her when he sneaked out of the house as a teenager, when he took the position out of town, when he moved her into the care facility. I dream the same dream over and over with different specifics. I am unable to fulfill the simple task before me—getting to class, getting a meal on, getting the children ready for church. I always wake up before the many obstacles are overcome, feeling defeated, inadequate, overwhelmed. We comfort each other, rehearse the futility of guilt and remorse, and the pandemic seems almost beside the point of a larger life.

Sometimes I leave out details and suspect he does too. I recounted this one for him: he and I were participating in a protest march when I started to realize his face was turning dark, his hands, his white skin becoming brown, eventually black. I thought it was appropriate, even cool, the ultimate sign of solidarity. What I don’t say is that I also felt betrayed, left out, suspicious of his motives in turning dark without telling me, without including me in the plan. I share with him my dream in which I am a tree that holds a robin’s nest. I am in the path of a hurricane, and I lose many limbs, nearly all my leaves. The nest, of course, is destroyed, but I am not quite uprooted and cannot search for it, for my bird. I tell him the story of the dream, but do not say how when I awake, I am so overcome with loss, I fight the urge to cry all day. Even knowing I have been dreaming, my grief is real, here and now, 2020, almost too much to bear. What good would it do to tell him that?

I suspect he dreams things he doesn’t discuss with me. Maybe he dreams that we have run out of food, run out of money, that I have the virus—or he does, refuses to admit it, tries to ignore his fatigue, represses his coughing so as not to alarm or inconvenience

me or the kids. He does not want to speak such a dream in this house, where we are safe enough, happy enough. So instead he is quiet, listens to the dream I bring him today—the one where we are delighted to learn I have been unanimously chosen as the first woman who is to travel to the moon and back.

Six Feet Apart

Ian Brundige

The first time nothing was that serious, yet. They drove around the suburbs, just talking: all the awkwardness of a first date, questions about families and futures. But it was even more unusual for the two of them, just talking. Most Grindr hookups have a distinct beginning, climax, and swift end, but considering everyone was locked inside, the usual routine wasn't feasible for two people who live with their families.

At some point Aidan pulled over and asked Jon to get out of the car so they could *just* hug, both restricted and turned on by the gaze of passing cars and the subtle social taboo of being far fewer than six feet apart. Time seemed to slip around them, and itself, more like a cloud than a straight line. Not long after they released each other from the embrace they were tangled in the darkness and white sheets of a cheap hotel. Other than their direct families, they were the only people each other saw, so even though most of the time they just drove around talking about their memories and dreams, by the fourth time they met, the world felt much smaller. Small enough that their lives began to orbit around each other, like an asteroid pulled towards Earth, enamored by its size and complexity.

Tired of making out over a car console, and weary of hotels, they pondered safe quarantine date ideas. They decided to go to a playground, so Aidan led them into the labyrinth of quiet suburban cul-de-sacs where he grew up.

"Today was the day, supposed to be the day, the day where if you are in middle school or high school, after school got out, you felt like you could do anything," Jon said, looking at the empty park as they got out of the car.

For him that was just three springs ago, but Aidan was already years out of college. He only moved back in with his parents for the time being, to take care of them, and to get out of the city. He didn't have plans on meeting anyone, let alone someone so much younger than him.

"What are you talking about? Are you high?" Aiden joked, presenting the already half-empty dab pen to Jon as they walked towards the primary color playground. "Wanna get higher?" he asked, pointing towards the swings.

"Yeah," Jon laughed, getting back to his thought. "The weather is amazing, finally. There should be more people out, kids playing and stuff."

The sun was shining after two weeks of overcast skies and two months of the lake's brutal snow. It was the first real day of spring and everything seemed brighter, greener, lighter. Jon flew into the air.

"The park is closed!" A shout came from a parked car.

Both men looked up to see where it was coming from. "I will call the police," the faceless voice followed up. Jon immediately crashed to the ground, his high paranoia only amplified by his blackness.

Aidan immediately turned towards the car, his high confidence only amplified by his whiteness. This was *his* childhood park and he wasn't going to let some bored wine mom tell him he couldn't use it. He only stopped when he saw Jon halfway back to their car, head down knocked off of his high. At the threat of the police Jon's stomach dropped to his feet like the moment a swing reaches its peak.

"It's fine," Aidan said when they were back in the car, "I know where a better park is."

"It's going to be closed too, that woman was right," Jon inserted matter-of-factly.

"White people, doesn't she have anything better to do?" Aidan muttered.

"No. No one has anything to do," Jon said, shaking his head at the blatant irony of Aidan's socks with Nike slides and the blind privilege that proclaimed his definitive whiteness.

"Is that your other park?" he added smugly, spotting a corrugated plastic sign with bold red letter reading: "Park closed," from down the street.

Motion Sickness: Paradise Lost to the Pandemic

Dan Carpenter

It was *Swan Lake* that we were cheated out of by the Grey Plague of 2020, but *Sleeping Beauty* is the show that might have more fittingly gone on.

Cancellation of *Swan Lake* by the world-class Butler University Ballet was part of a spate of shutdowns that began in March across the Northside institution a few blocks from our house and eventually froze that beehive of youth into something like the kingdom put to sleep for a century by the sorceress in the other classic.

Even more desolate, in its way. No people captured in place as they strolled to class, as they fought Hinkle Fieldhouse traffic on a game night, as they chased Frisbees across a Greek house lawn, as they filled Clowes Memorial Hall and the Schrott Center with all that polished energy and joyful applause.

Nope. For the bulk of the spring and summer, anyway, it was expanses of grass and asphalt dotted here and there with a car, a maintenance worker, a campus cop, a stray soul more likely to be a neighbor on a dog walk than a student.

“I can see why they need the Butler PD out,” a friend observed. “It’s a great time for break-ins.”

Now, I have to say that hardship, so rampant in the time of Corona, hasn’t been our household’s lot. Boredom, anxiety, frustration with what has passed for leadership – they’ve weighed on Mary and me, to be sure. Grief has played its cruel pandemic game with us as with so many others: We were forced to settle for a Zoom memorial service when we lost our beloved former pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas, the parish serving Butler’s Catholic students. The larger society’s tensions of the moment came calling in due course also, from both left and right, in the form of demonstrations for racial justice, and against the wearing of masks, at the gates of the Governor’s mansion a half mile off campus where we take our daily walks. But still, we were cushioned. Work was online, part-time and sufficient. Well-stocked grocery stores surrounded us. Good books were as plentiful as bad television.

If we were deprived, sitting out the pandemic, it was not so much in going without the standard conveniences as it was in sitting out the ball that flashed its costumes and lights just outside our door in normal times.

This coming together for entertainment and cultural fare, from ballet to Broadway to poetry readings, has been a staple of our lives as neighbors to a university. Never can it

be taken for granted, and it can feel like outright oxygen when it is ripped away. Sports nourishes also, and it hurts to walk daily past that little jewel of a quiet football stadium and the great big famous barn where the basketball Bulldogs worked through the winter to prepare themselves for a national stage that went dark.

Butler's Big Dance was the title of a book Butler professor and author Susan Neville wrote a decade ago using the nickname sportswriters hung on a tournament where Butler arrives as Cinderella most every year. Doubly apt for a school that breaks a leg with the best of them on the theatrical boards.

Da! The chops to do Tchaikovsky, and do Tchaikovsky again. Who could have imagined, four months or so before the doomed *Swan Lake*, that the annual glorious *Nutcracker* by that same powerhouse Butler Ballet and orchestra would bring the last hurrah for most of us, wedged shoulder to shoulder in the plush red seats of Clowes decked out in our holiday best? I remember saying to myself in the afterglow "It doesn't get any better than this." Forgive my exuberance. After all, it's only gotten worse since.

How we loved watching those gifted "kids" in their off hours as well, mingling with their peers and the neighbors at the campus Starbucks, set apart by their slender grace and the leotards and austere hair buns of the females. An old coot could meet his maker with a smile, keeling over onto his cappuccino in a setting such as that.

So, we had this beauty put to sleep on us. And there you have a clear-cut indictment of those in power, and their millions of lazy accomplices, who danced around a disaster in the making and then let the band keep playing on long after the disaster did happen.

Today on my neighborhood campus, the students are back in force for a fall semester that could well look like the 2019 normal if the general populace had fallen into line and slowed its steps for a few weeks in the spring. Instead, the school's caught up in the national frenzy of hacking out choreography for some manner of instruction while fumbling around for the stage lights.

My fresh young neighbors, meanwhile, are not entirely welcome. Like their counterparts everywhere else, they're keeping their distance and wearing their masks except when they are not. Hell yes, they like to party. I'd like to party with them. I'd just prefer to make a reservation and catch the fun in a numbered seat. Let the front porch blast of heavy metal fade into the swell of that Russian *Overture*. Strike up the pep band. We've been walking and jogging and biking and stroller-pushing past this limbo long enough. We've got to have a Big Dance coming to us. There's just too much ugliness to kiss away.

Athena

Bryn Cousins

The impact of Covid-19 has affected millions of people worldwide. For many young adults, it meant their senior year, whether high school or college, was abruptly changed. Many, like myself, didn't get to walk across the stage to receive their diploma. Many people experienced significant anxiety and loss, but it was the simplest thing that impacted me the most: accompanying my pet for her vet visits.

Athena came into my life in March 2019. I walked into the Humane Society simply to play with cats, and walked out with an elderly, special needs kitty. At the Humane Society, Athena had all but two of her teeth removed due to gum disease. Since she still had a couple teeth, she needed both an antibiotic and a steroid shot on a regular basis to keep the inflammation and pain at bay.

I helped her, she helped me.

She was my emotional support animal and gave comfort when my anxiety and depression were too much to bear. When Covid-19 hit, she became all that more valuable to me. Her rumbling purrs, her raspy meows, her warm body sitting heavy on my chest, sending healing vibrations through to my core, they all helped ground me in the moment. She would chase the tangled threads of my panicked thoughts, pawing them together to form a yarn ball of "as long as I have her, it'll be okay." I had her, she had me. We were two lone souls in the world, brought together by happenstance, navigating the stormy seas in a weathered rowboat, just trying to stay afloat.

"As long as I have her, I'll be okay."

Athena was by my side through an abusive relationship, the death of my grandmother, returning to college after two and a half years off, two instances of short-term disability due to mental health issues, and finally, through the beginning of the pandemic. In the middle of April, I took her to the vet for her normal shots, but I was unable to go inside the office with her. The technician came to my car and whisked her away inside, while I was left to sit in my car and wait for the vet to call me. It was odd. I didn't like being separated from her, my lifeline. I wanted to be by her side, petting her and saying "good girl" as the vet poked and prodded her. I wanted to return the comfort she had provided me. But I couldn't. I had to wait.

That one visit in April turned into two, as, a couple weeks later, she was crying out in pain and pawing at her mouth.

Something wasn't right.

I waited in my car again, the anxiety and worry emanating from me almost palpable, and, two shots later, she was back home with me. We took it easy. I gave her all of her favorite foods, I held her close, stroking her fur, rough with age, listening to the low grumble of her purr, and prayed everything would work out.

I took more pictures of her. Every "derpy" face, every time her tongue was out in a "blep," every single time she turned her emerald green eyes towards me, affection and gratitude echoing across our gazes, I wanted to remember it all. Just in case.

Her energy had dropped considerably. She was sleeping all the time. But, when she was sleeping, her breathing was off. It was labored, forced, like she was fighting the world just to take a single breath. This led to a third visit that I spent in my car, just barely two and a half weeks later. Fearing the worst, my fingers were flying across my phone, checking low bank accounts, maxed-out credit cards, and miniscule paychecks, punching numbers into a calculator, trying to figure out how I could afford to keep Athena alive. I could stand to lose a few pounds, I could skip breakfast and lunch for the next few weeks, save money to save her. I was barely breathing myself, crying, staring at the large, negative number on my phone calculator.

When the vet called, she was silent for a moment, unsure of how to begin. She told me about Athena's throat, how there were two masses on either side, potentially tumors, potentially the largest lymph nodes the vet had seen. How it was restricting her breathing. How it could be cancer. How they could give her a third round of her normal shots, third in just over a month, but they didn't know if that would help.

I asked the vet if it was Athena's time.

She said she didn't know.

We did the third round of shots, and set up a fourth appointment for that following Saturday, after payday, to see if the swelling in her throat had gone down.

I called my grandparents and asked them if they could send me my Christmas money early, so I could pay for whatever treatment Athena needed. They agreed, and listened to me cry, providing comfort over the phone, telling me I was doing the right thing, telling me I was such a good owner for doing all of this.

I didn't feel like a good owner.

I felt helpless. I felt lost. I was overwhelmed. Our little rowboat was capsizing, throwing me overboard, leaving me to the mercy of the tumultuous sea.

The fourth visit was the Saturday before Memorial Day. I had scrounged up enough money to pay for bloodwork, but we would have to wait until after the holiday to find out the results.

Once home, we curled up on the couch together. I held Athena close, my tears soaking into her fur. I couldn't lose her. I couldn't. I'd only had her for fourteen months. She was only fourteen and a half. She still had so many more years left ahead of her. She couldn't leave me, not yet.

Tuesday, the vet called.

I held my breath, waiting, praying, for good news that my gut knew wouldn't come.

Her white blood cells were twice the high end of normal. Almost 40,000.

We decided to try a stronger, daily, antibiotic, and a daily pain medication. I spoke with my grandfather, an anesthesiologist and certified cat lover, who told me that if Athena didn't show improvement in four days, she wouldn't get better. I prayed to whatever godly being that would listen: don't take Athena from me.

The "what ifs" started clouding my mind.

What if she had been adopted by a wealthy family? They would certainly be able to save her. What if she doesn't respond to the medication? What if she doesn't get better? What if I have to let her go? What will I do with my life then?

Four days passed. Then five more.

I didn't want to give up, but after nine days on the medications, and seeing no improvements, just more lethargy and more crying out in pain, I knew it was time.

Four vet visits in five and a half weeks. I wasn't allowed to be with Athena for a single one of them, thanks to Covid-19. I wasn't allowed to be with my beloved pet as she was being seen for an unknown illness, while she was scared and in pain, at the end of her life. I couldn't comfort her while she got all the shots, while her blood was drawn, nothing. All I was allowed to do was sit in the parking lot and wait.

I rode with my mom and Athena to a different vet clinic. All of the vet visits had drained what little money I had, and Covid-19 had reduced my work hours, so I was unable to make more than what I was spending. I had to go with a different clinic that was cheaper for the euthanasia and cremation.

The first time I was with Athena in a vet clinic since Covid-19 had started was the last time I would ever be in a vet clinic with her.

I held her, whispered soft nothings into her rough fur, cried openly in front of the vet and my mom. She turned around on the table to stare into my eyes, and I saw nothing but understanding and acceptance echoing in those emerald pools. She knew I was doing this for her. She knew she was going to be free. She turned back around and nestled down into my arms, and I nodded to the vet. It was time to let her go.

Athena crossed the rainbow bridge on June 9th and she took a part of my heart with her.

Now it's September, and Covid-19 is still here.

I wish Athena was here instead.

I love you, and miss you, Athena. Rest in peace, sweet girl.

Where Is Home in a Global Pandemic?

Rosaleen Crowley

Beginning of March 2020 was like many other months. It was busy! I was very excited to be the featured poet at Brick Street Poetry at the Munce Sullivan Museum in Zionsville, Indiana on March 5. A smaller than usual number of people were in attendance, but I felt a wonderful connection and gratitude for the attention and engagement of friends, family and colleagues.

Next day, March 6, was equally invigorating. The International Women's Day luncheon was organized by International Women Indiana. It was held at the Woodstock Club. The topic was "Empowerment Through the Vote; Women's Suffrage, Past, Present & Future." This would be the same day that Indiana recorded its first death due to Covid- 19.

It took another seven days for the realization to come to me that this virus was serious. After a few more visits to my regular cafés, I made the decision that the only thing that was important was to shut the door and remain at home without contact with other humans besides my husband, Brendan.

My work had been focused on publishing my third paintings and poetry book. This book called *Point of Perception* took on an urgency. I told Brendan, "I'm afraid I might die before my trilogy is published." Originally, my goal was to get it printed by November, 2020. Now on March 13, I was in a panic to make sure all the people were in place, the i(s) dotted and t(s) crossed.

The previous August I had sent the images of the paintings to the digital and cover designer, Nicholas. He was living in London. I contacted him and learned that he was in the process of traveling to Ireland. England was not coping with the intensity of the Covid-19 cases. My thoughts rushed to his well-being. I wondered if my images were still on CDs or if they were in a file on his computer. My mind was in a whirl. I thought Nicholas might die! Selfishly, I thought that *Point of Perception* would never get to print.

The experience of following the same publishing processes that had happened in 2016 and 2018 for *Point of Connection* and *Point of Reflection*, respectively, now in 2020 took on a whole different meaning. Compromises were made. This is the "new normal." Things were different now. Expectations of oneself and of others needed to be adjusted. Perfection was in the rear mirror. Speed was gone out the window. These thoughts, expressed here as clichés, reflect the way my mind was revolving around seeking comfort in words. I was searching for inner peace and calm.

I received the blurbs for the back of the book from Rosalyn and Donna. I sent my manuscript to my trusted mentor and coach, Nancy. All the pieces were coming together. It was a big distraction from worrying about my family and friends.

Kari, the printer, was in Minnesota. I called and asked for samples of hard cover books. When they arrived, they remained in the garage for three days before I timidly approached and cut the plastic wrapping. It took the joy out of touching the cover and paper. Even looking at the font size and quality of images was upsetting. You felt as if a virus could jump out on you.

On a very hot day in May, a crate of books arrived. Five hundred in all. Luckily, I had the previous crate so I could swap it out. I planned on keeping them in the garage for three days. However, due to the heat, I brought them indoors within twenty-four hours to store them at room temperature. My books had arrived. I could die happily!

An anticlimax set in after a few days. No more poetry readings! After an initial spurt of energy to convert to virtual, a sense of missing in person meetings weighed heavy on me. A repetition of getting up, going to bed and cleaning and cooking chores became humdrum. Brendan did the grocery shopping. Our lives took on a routine of its own.

Eventually, it was June and I ventured out for the first time. I saw people going about their business. I was surprised. Why were so many people out and about? Didn't they know there was a virus circulating? Returning to the cafés was not as much fun. A feeling of angst became our "new normal."

Brendan and I were both born in Ireland. We made a decision. We decided to visit family in Ireland. We bought airline tickets as my poem, *The Best of Both Worlds*, says "Whether the sun shines Or the wind blows, You'll find me on an airplane going home." We didn't know what to expect. What lay ahead? Would we be safe? Would we get in? Would we get out?

We were welcomed "home" on arrival by the airport officials. "Restricted movement" for fourteen days turned out to be a gift. Early morning, quiet walks along a quiet beach, home cooked Irish food—potatoes, vegetables and meat—comforted us. I mustn't forget the wine!

"Living near the sea has challenges, living four thousand miles away has challenges," a line from my poem, "Dandelions and Moss," takes on a new meaning. At first, the change was refreshing. There was a new set of rules to follow. We had missed the

serious lockdown with people only allowed to move 2 kilometers from their homes, then five then twenty. We arrived when there was a sense that things were opening up. With opening up comes increase in cases and some deaths. Ireland's deaths were low in comparison to Indiana. The median age of those getting the virus was lower in Ireland up until the beginning of September. The news from the USA was easily available on internet or television. We followed along and kept in touch.

When you weren't focused on the news about the virus, you could feel the beauty of nature. Even when the sun didn't shine you could walk down by the sea and feel the mist in your face. The voluptuous clouds rained down. The sand and stones were splashed over the sea wall. At night, the howling of the wind tore along the roofs of houses.

I attended a writing retreat on three mornings towards the end of August, at Molly Keane Writers Retreat in Ardmore, Co Waterford. Our instructor, Lani, ensured that we were socially distanced and outside only. We had magic moments of inspiration, comradery, support and normal writers' stuff! We were introduced to a beach that I didn't know. It was called Goats island. We drew in the sand. We visited St Declan's Well and let our minds wrap around the stories of spiritual healing.

What will heal this world? Could it be ironic that a virus will be the thing to heal us? Could it stop us in our tracks and ask how can we make a difference? How can we bring hope to the despairing, remove pain from those hurting? Who will bring peace to the war-ravaged countries? How do we reverse the damage done to generations by systemic injustice?

We don't know what the future holds. Our "old normal" way of a life of travel "over and back" to Ireland has become more difficult and uncertain. Presently, I'm torn between living two lives. I feel at home in two countries.

In the end, a return ticket says it all. As my poem, "Here, There and Back Again," says, "Visit Ireland again but Hurry on back to Indiana."

Ode to My Student Who Is Starving

Jodie English

“Professor English, I’m sorry I am turning this in late. I was having internet issues and I was trying to make it to a food pantry to get some food.”

Even before Covid-19, he used to slip in the back
of Jordan 65, late from his security job,
and the moment we broke, bolt for the door
to punch back in on time.

Now he is trying to complete 16 credits online
with his cell phone. He bikes to a public parking lot
where they’ve made free wifi available
and joins the other destitute students with burner phones,
who stagger themselves at six foot lengths,
standing or sitting on cement
for the two hour virtual class, suffering

from hunger’s reality show,
while others who chartered a plane to Cabo
trawl the marina, graze at the all-you-can-eat taco bars
and join my zoom classroom
with backdrops of palms and the infinite sea.

My student eats, if he eats,
foodbank corn and beans,
what the restaurants couldn’t sell
to the grub hub crowd,
shriveled capers in rancid olive oil,
the wilted romaine, withered beans.

He is dumb with desire for a meal
and his degree. Close
to a bag of bones
with dark eyes, stricken numb
in his threadbare coat,
torn backpack
and off label jeans.

Covidian Nocturne
Jodie English

Working late, I take a break
and stand in the shadows
of my backyard
where midnight shrouds
the emerald greens
of spring in black.

Every day, color drains from thousands
of faces, lungs once pink now gray
as redbuds at midnight
and thousands can't breathe
without a simple machine
we don't have enough of.

I stand on the dark yard's
cooling board
and look back at my bolted windows,
my reflection slit
by the panes
where dawn once gleamed.

Taken Away
Marjie Giffin

Things that I love were taken away:
hugs for my grandkids, kisses galore,
trips to the store upon a whim
or an ache for fresh air and space.
Shared coffees with colleagues;
sundown cruises on a blue pontoon,
nestling side by side in the day's waning
rays. Peace of mind. Anticipatory joys.

Yet I feel no anguish at the loss
of a loved one, and I'm not bidding
good-bye on a cold, remote screen.
I have blessings: the sun still warms
my cheeks, the path through the nearby
woods offers red and gold leaves
for my feet to crunch. I can summon
hope; I can still envision tomorrow.

Ballad for the Silent Stage

Rachel Hedges

The Chatterbox Jazz Club is closed, indefinitely.
There will be no performers tonight, no drinks and no red lights.

The walls and doors will speak, yes of course, with no sound.
They're talking memories with ghosts, but the living aren't around.
All is quiet, when the jazz stops, and the the dust settles down.
The Chatterbox is closed, it's all dark for now.

It started with pulse, you know, an unshakeable beat.
It could stand in like a square, four-sided and complete.
It could swing by in three; like Bluesette, or Emily.
It could surprise and take five, break the mold, set you free.
Or a pause, for the cause, pass the can, have a seat.

There was no place for strangers, no one cared what you wore.
You came in to be dressed by the tension and the warmth.
There was no room for dancing, but we danced anyway.
We breathed into the heart beats. We shared air, we shared space.

I am wondering now, what this place will be.
Is the silence for good, is the stage light extinct?
Is my club card expired, will my key fit the door?
Where will I go, if I don't go there anymore?

Jazz cats, the 'Box is closed while we shelter in place.
We can't taste the booze, but the spirits have stayed.
The piano hasn't been moved, I mean, emotionally.
No players come through, just the noise from the street.

The Chatterbox Jazz Club is closed, indefinitely.
Keep her close in your heart, so she still feels the beat.

Lost Time

Cara Howard

When the pandemic arrived in March 2020, the alarm clock beside my bed sat silent for months. I didn't miss its loud, staccato sound forcing my body to wake and rise to the grind. I didn't miss its urgency that launched me into the day, or the frustration it fed in me when my youngest slept right through his own alarm, forcing me to wake him myself. I didn't miss having to prod my kids to keep moving, lest they miss the school buses coming for them at 7:03 and 7:51. I learned that my internal clock wakes me most mornings within thirty minutes of the time my alarm clock would have anyway.

As our lives slowed to a halt, time lost its specificity. We worked and played and went about our days in chunks of time rather than according to a schedule. Our days at home blurred into one another without the distinct line items on the calendar that dictated where to go and when to be there. Our school district's plan for the kids' e-learning was hastily thrown together. With no official boundaries for when it had to be done, one of my kids dragged his feet, stretching the work out much longer than necessary. What should have only taken a couple of hours managed to last all day.

The need to plan the most efficient travel route disappeared when we couldn't leave home. Virtual connections relied on both parties' motivation levels and wifi signals. Any socially distant, in-person visits with other people required agreeable weather and flexibility. On the rare occasions that we needed to log on to a Zoom screen at a certain time, I felt the weight of it in a new way. I began to fear I'd lost the hang of precise living.

When the world shut down, time expanded beyond our ability to fill it. We sensed that we were living through a moment in history, participating in a global event we would never forget. Yet as the days continued to accumulate, they became indistinct. I started a quarantine journal in an effort to collect data. My daily entries included whatever new tidbit of information we learned about the virus, whatever crazy thing the president announced in a press briefing, whatever activities filled our day. Most of what I typed was boring and mundane: the walks we took, the meals we cooked, the games we played, the movies we watched. But I feared that if I didn't write down what made one day different from the next, the whole experience would be lost.

Slowly, we got word of the pandemic's impact on people we knew and loved. A friend said goodbye to her mother over FaceTime as she died in a nursing home. Both parents of some girls I grew up with were hospitalized and placed on ventilators for months. My daughter's cello teacher fought to recover from the virus only to face recurring rounds of symptoms. He remained too exhausted and short of breath to resume virtual lessons.

Our hearts hurt with every piece of bad news that reached us. But the physical isolation of staying at home provided a sort of insulation, as if the only real world was the one inside our walls. Everything outside felt distant, muted.

In this strange season, time lost its urgency. Motivation fizzled with the removal of structure. Whatever sense of possibility we might have felt at the beginning of our time sheltering-in-place quickly faded. With no end in sight, self-improvement projects felt pointless. All I had to show for my initial sense of ambition were a few cleaned-out closets, a few knit hats, a few attempts at new dinner recipes.

To maintain order and sanity, I typed up and printed personalized daily checklists for me and the kids and hung them on the front of the fridge with a magnet. These rules outlined the tasks each of us “must do,” I explained to the kids, before we can move on to the things we “may do.” Mine included reading, writing, exercise, supervising e-learning, keeping our daily journal, and performing a daily kindness. The lists assigned purpose to otherwise boring and endless days, while allowing for some flexibility. Most days, we checked them all off. Some days, we cheated a little.

With a thick, black Sharpie, I crossed off each day as it passed on the calendar hanging on our kitchen wall. At first, each “x” felt like an accomplishment. One more day down, one day closer to the end of the crisis. A quick glance gave us a sense of how far we’d come. But as the months dragged on, I gave up and left the marker in the junk drawer.

The longer it continues, the more pre-pandemic time has become a memory I can’t quite grasp, like a fragment of a dream upon waking. I struggle to wrap my mind around the fact that it’s only been six months since the world shut down in March. I expected to adjust our lifestyle for a couple of weeks, or at most, a couple of months. But at this point, I’m losing the ability to imagine how and when it might end. Instead, I’m starting to adjust to this strange new world, to manage the uncertainty and expect the unexpected, living one day at a time.

This year has revealed time to be flexible, malleable, and relative. It sprints toward the finish when I engage in meaningful conversations with friends. It lumbers along on afternoons when the kids are bored and I’ve run out of ideas about what we can safely do. I miss order and predictability, and the confidence with which I used to make plans. But I wonder if the things I liked about time back then will be relevant in the future. I wonder if I’ll ever forget the lesson I’ve learned from this: time is an abstract concept propping up the illusion of our control. The clock that once seemed to demand so much has lost its power. It’s up to us to wake up and use our limited agency to decide how to use our numbered days.

Shelter-in-Place

Cara Howard

Cancel everything. Yes, really, *everything*. It took a couple of weeks for me to realize that none of the events or appointments or responsibilities I thought of as “essential” really was. The dry-erase calendar on the side of the refrigerator, usually cluttered with times and names and places, was wiped clean. No track practice. No music lessons. No playdates or sleepovers. No dinners out with family or friends. Not even school or church. The white squares reflected our eerie new reality, wide stretches of days with nothing to fill them.

To help us stay oriented in time, I continued to update the handwritten dates beside the “week of:” label at the top. Instead of our daily schedules, I wrote the only plans we knew we would keep: the meals we planned to cook, the ones we rotated through, the ones we shopped for almost two weeks prior when my husband last went to the grocery. Wearing a red bandana around his face for a makeshift mask, he looked like a poorly costumed actor cast as a bank robber from the Wild West. He looked ridiculous and he knew it. Though he doubted its effectiveness for protecting him from the virus, he wore it to put my mind at ease.

As our family’s hunter-gatherer, he bravely wound through the aisles of sparsely stocked shelves to find as many things as he could on our list. I waited for him to arrive so I could help unload them. When he pulled into the garage, I stood next to door with Clorox wipes at the ready. He unloaded the trunk, handing me one bag at a time. I sanitized most items and put the non-perishables we didn’t need immediately into the corner of the dining room. A few days later, after they had finished their time in grocery quarantine, I’d move them onto the pantry shelves.

After grocery runs, we often had to adjust our menu. “Still no beans,” my husband would tell me. *Who’s stockpiling beans?* we wondered. *Maybe the same people who are hoarding all the toilet paper*, we joked. After one trip, he pulled a six-pack of Angel Soft toilet paper out of the grocery bag, triumphant. But his eyes widened and his smile faded when I pointed out the detail he’d missed. “Lavender-scented toilet paper?” I exclaimed, wrinkling my nose at the strong odor. We didn’t even know that was a thing. Despite the plastic packaging, the heavy floral scent quickly permeated the atmosphere of our home. *Well, beggars can’t be choosers*, we decided.

While not on the front lines of this pandemic, my husband is an essential worker. He works in a cancer center, providing radiation therapy to patients. He kept going to work. But the hospital soon encouraged his team to rotate shifts inside the building in order to

reduce potential exposure for everyone. We were relieved to have him home more often.

The only other thing I wrote on the weekly calendar were the days he had to work at the hospital. Thankfully, that was reduced to a couple of days per week. Thankfully, that meant he was still getting paid. Thankfully, he managed to avoid contracting the virus or bringing it home to the rest of us who were sheltering-in-place. But just like the groceries, he put himself through a decontamination process after every day he went to work. He left his shoes and belt in the garage. (Too hard to clean.) He knocked on the door when he arrived. Someone had to hold the dog, so she wouldn't run to him. Someone else opened the door for him and turned on the kitchen faucet so he could wash his hands. After that, he headed straight upstairs to shower and change clothes before rejoining the family.

The usually smudged and cluttered board is now crisp and sparse. It reminds me that we live in the present, and these basics are what matter most. I don't miss looking at our days as a gauntlet of activities through which we all must run. I don't miss checking to make sure I'm not late shuttling the kids from one place to the next. The simplicity of our schedule brings me secret glee, even as my heart aches, wondering when it'll be safe to emerge, to see and hug our friends and family. I keep thinking about what comes next. What will a return to normal look like? Is normal even a thing we can return to? Maybe it never existed.

Normal is formed by the structure of activities that we repeat. They become so familiar, so ingrained, that to stop them feels strange. But as we sheltered-in-place, I realized: we created our "normal" in the first place. Maybe this unexpected break in our usual rhythm will set us free to reevaluate our priorities. Maybe this is our chance to recreate what will become "normal" when the world reopens.

Zoom Summer Camp

Francia Kay Kissel

My nine-year-old granddaughter Elle woke up one morning this summer and declared to her mom, “I *desperately* have to get to Indiana to see Grandma and Grandpa!” Her family lives in Ohio, not far away, but we hadn’t seen each other for several months, due to Covid.

One of the lowlights of the pandemic for many my age has been our separation from grandchildren, resulting in a visceral homesickness for each other, felt by both generations.

In our family, we had thought that by this summer, the grandkids would be old enough to stay at Grandma’s for a week by themselves. For years we have been planning to host them at “Camp Kissel.” Our house, surrounded by fields, driveways, barns, and farm buildings, offers plenty of room to catch bugs and fly kites, to run and climb trees, or to scooter, bike, and ride on the Bobcat with Grandpa. And, of course, camp would be supplemented with visits to museums and the zoo.

Those pleasures had to be put on hold as the pandemic continued. And, although we have visited a couple of times—outdoors and wearing masks—we still miss one another deeply.

Home-made summer camp over Zoom has helped ease some of our longing. Grandma and the two grandkids have met each other weekly online for lengthy sessions where we explore the kids’ interests. I have learned about their favorite topics. Owee, who is six, has two favorite whales and three favorite sharks, and they love to draw. We have read and re-read favorite library books and learned new facts about nature, world cultures, and history. The summer has been far richer for both generations with the help of Zoom.

Elle, Owee, and I became virtual birders, using “Bird Song Hero” to learn bird calls and picking up knowledge of bird anatomy and variation through birding websites. When the kids went hiking or kayaking or even for neighborhood walks, they were ecstatic to recognize bird calls, and their parents were pretty excited that the kids knew so much. In mid-June, when the eaglets near our home were preparing to fledge, our grandkids could not visit Indiana to see them. Instead of hiking through the hayfield and staring way up at the nest in an old sycamore spar, we took a substitute field trip on Zoom camp. Through bird cams, we watched osprey chicks walk around their nest and learn to fly short hops—very similar to seeing our Indiana eaglets, but better close-ups.

Zoos were closed for much of the summer. But together, the grandkids and I visited zoos and aquaria from coast to coast, stretching from the National Zoo in Washington, DC, to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. We watched land animals and sea life through the magic of share-screen and live web cam feeds: funny naked mole-rats, adorable pandas, silent sharks and rays, fierce-looking Komodo dragons, and more. Owee's favorite mammal is the manatee, so we periodically zoomed to see the animals eat lunch by way of the Homosassa Springs Manatee Cam.

We have flown around the earth, too. Together we created Owee and Elle-Belle's Excellent Adventure, a project in Google Earth. Our starting point was their home in Ohio, and they were thrilled to find themselves way up in space, then zooming down to their driveway at a hundred miles an hour. We added familiar spots to their map: the Olentangy River, Evening Street Elementary, their other grandparents' home, each time swooping out to global view, then zooming back to street level with gasps of excitement (some of the gasps coming from Grandma). Then we added stops around the world—Venice (Elle's favorite city), the Mariana Trench (the Pacific is Owee's favorite ocean), the Eiffel Tower, their cousin's new house in Denver, the pyramids at Giza—all sites they want someday to visit.

In other camp sessions, we explored myth—mostly Greek and Roman, but also urban myths; we read up on early British and Viking history; we practiced juggling; we drummed in a Djembe drumming circle; we watched parkour lessons (the kids swearing not to tell their parents); we watched explosions resulting from chemical reactions; and we observed the songs and courtship dances of every single one of the 39 species of New Guinea Birds-of-Paradise.

Camp Kissel usually meets on Friday mornings, when the children's pandemic babysitter does not come to their house. My meeting space is generally at the kitchen table, but once Owee shimmied up a tree at his house, taking me along on his tablet for a vertigo-inducing climb. At their end, the grandkids often meet from their "office": a hall closet with tri-level stepped shelves. Each shelf is wide enough for a child, some pillows, and assorted supplies. The closet walls are papered with handmade art projects, some created during Zoom summer camp.

Both kids, it turns out, love to draw. Initially we drew on Zoom's whiteboard, but when our art became more advanced, Elle and Owee began keeping paper, pencils, and markers near their tablets. Our drawings have included fantastical made-up creatures, magical lands, robots, animals, human faces, and optical illusions. Their favorite Zoom

sessions include exploring topics for a couple of hours, then creating art inspired by what we've learned together.

It's really, really difficult to get Elle and Owee to agree that summer camp is over when the session is scheduled to end. "One more book!" "One more drawing!" Or, if Owee is asking, "Three more!"

Drawing and virtual visits to the library are great ways to wind down after our online adventures. When we began camp, I had no idea of the vast and wonderful children's resources offered electronically by local libraries. Book lovers can check out and read thousands of online books from *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* to children's picture books. Our faves? Robert Munch books, especially *Stephanie's Ponytail* and its line "U-g-ly, u-g-ly, very u-g-ly," which has become a family meme. We also like pirate books, and if I can't get Owee to agree camp is over, I promise him a last and final reading of *Pirates Love Underpants*.

My son-in-law tells me that I could market Camp Kissel, and when I ask for feedback about a particular camp session, my daughter says, "They loved it!" I know that both Elle and Owee regularly give up more entertaining pursuits to meet me online. However, when I mention Zoom summer camp to people my age, I get the feeling they are restraining themselves from rolling their eyes. Maybe they think it's a crazy thing for a grandma to do. It is crazy—wild, wonderful, and creative, and I have loved every minute. Including the ubiquitous fart jokes.

Zoom summer camp has been great for me in easing the homesickness for grandkids. I feel connected with them; I am learning new topics with them every session; I am privileged to see how their brains are developing and what their interests are. I am helping my daughter, as she doesn't have time to curate appropriate content from the internet, and there are such treasures to be found. Grandpa likes summer camp, too, and he frequently stops by the Zoom session to bring photos of a praying mantis or robins nesting on the farm equipment.

I often wonder if the pandemic will ever be over. I both worry and pray excessively for all the people in the world affected by the physical, financial, and emotional hardships of this plague. But Zoom summer camp has been a little miracle to me, and I am glad for this one bright gift in such a year.

Letter to My Ancestors During a Pandemic

Norbert Krapf

Michael, born in 1791, I start with you, my great-great-grandfather. An agricultural day-laborer, like other Krapf males, you brought your wife Elizabeth and six children with you in 1846, through Ellis Island, no doubt dreaming of a better life for all. I hope you never had to think of a nasty pandemic. You oversaw the building of the brick farmhouse, which I call the Krapf Homestead, after you bought 42 acres in Spencer County, southern Indiana, in 1853 for \$52.54. You must have written to your father, Conrad, back in Franconia, in northern Bavaria, to tell him what a great deal you got! You died in 1863 when my great-grandfather, Johann, inherited the house. Michael and Johann, I want you to know that during this pandemic I finished a long book, a memoir about the fifty years of my writing life. *Homecomings* will have pictures of the Krapf Homestead on the front and back covers, in honor of you and those who came here with you. I'm glad you didn't have to confront a pandemic, though I'm sure you had to confront all sorts of other obstacles, like the deaths of children of other immigrant families while you were crossing the Atlantic on the ship Louis Phillipe in 1846 after sailing from Le Havre.

Grandfather Benno, I know that your youngest son Jerome, my uncle, died in Germany in World War II. I want to tell you that I went all the way to northern Germany to find the hill in Strödt where, in March, 1945, Uncle Jerome died. Grandpa, I read the letter that you and Grandma Mary received from Jerome's buddy, a machine-gunner, in which he explained how your son, his ammunition bearer, died. This buddy from Michigan wrote that just before the battle began, Uncle Jerome knelt, said a quiet prayer, and died instantly after being hit. He had been a seminarian, left St. Meinrad Archabbey because of "nerve problems," and worked with young Indians in South Dakota before being drafted and sent to Germany. Grandpa, they say you died of a heart attack the next year, but I think you also died of a broken heart. Let no man dare say your youngest son died in vain, a "sucker," a "loser."

My father, Clarence, never stopped grieving about how his youngest brother died in our ancestral Germany. I'm glad it wasn't a pandemic that took you, Uncle Jerome, whom I never met, but I'm sure your death was traumatic enough for your nine siblings and all my relatives. I was not yet two when you died. I have the two owl bookends you gave my dad because, as you told him, "He was such a worry wart," a worrier, as my dad repeated to me. I have these wooden owls on a bookshelf. All you forebears I have been speaking to, your stories I searched out and told have inspired and sustained me these past fifty years.

Michael, nobody in the family even knew or remembered you fifty years ago when, in My late twenties, I started trying to find out where we came from. At least now we know about you and your beautiful brick house, eventually painted white, from which, by the grace and help of a good friend of the family, I was able to retrieve “two bricks and a board” as a souvenir in 1992 when the then current owners, not someone in our family, took down that grand farmhouse you and your family built in the early 1850s and dumped its ashes in what had been the cellar. I’m glad to know none of you and yours had to deal with a pandemic or a government that looks down upon immigrants with such contempt as ours does today. This pandemic is terrible, but the cruel, shameful attitude toward immigrants in our White House today in Washington may be even worse.

Michael and descendants, you should know that our daughter, Elizabeth Maria, whom we adopted as an infant from Bogotá, Colombia, has married a man from our ancestral Franconia, Alexander Lamm. They live in a 1712 house they bought, built before the United States was even a country. They plan to stay there. Our only grandchild, Peyton, before he turned six, would scream, “Uh oh! Yellow Hair!” when he saw on German TV the man who lives in the White House. It makes me sad but relieved to say that the Lamm-Krapf family lives in Germany, not the United States. Right now the future here does not look as good as it did before the current President, German in name only, came to live in what he considers *his* White House, not *ours*. Michael, I am, however, grateful *you* came here and did not have to live in a pandemic, quarantined with your family in the beautiful white farmhouse you and your family built. I write this with the “two bricks and a board” from your house resting on the top of a wooden, glass-enclosed book cabinet standing at my side, books about Franconia on the shelves, and etchings and photographs of Franconian scenes and friends on the walls of my study.

Something Dying in Me

Norbert Krapf

Something's dying in me & I don't know what it is. Can't say its name but I can tell you what I miss. I miss hugging my friends, holding them close & tight. I miss being up close so I can see into their eyes & feel what they're feeling. I miss walking anywhere I want to go without wearing a mask even if it has pretty colors & designs. Look, I'm not a rebel, a fanatic. I miss praying with other people & it doesn't really work for me to pray listening to others praying on a screen that I can see & hear sounds if it's voices that don't touch me. I miss sitting anywhere I want to sit, being close to people, even if I don't know & can't say their names. I like to watch people's faces from up close so I can read what they feel. I want to let my friends & those I love look into my face & not hide what I feel, even if it's fear or sadness or sorrow.

How long can I lock up my sorrows and my joys, if I still have them pent up inside me? Does this all mean something is dying inside of me? Have I had to lock up too much of what keeps me alive? Is what I call my spirit frozen up inside me? Do I have some kind of sickness that needs a doctor to make me heal? If you're in charge and read this, could you please give me a dispensation, an exception, just the simple permission to hug those I care for? To let them hug me if they want & need to? Is that too much to ask? Is there someone I could talk to, not virtually but in person, to tell my problems to, without being arrested or fined?

Sometimes I think I could and should be allowed to heal myself. Where must I find the right form to fill out to get permission to give and receive hugs, no matter how long they last? Is that too much to ask? Can you give me directions to find the right office? I don't know how long I can last without being able to hug or be hugged. I never imagined I might have to live a hugless life. Is that what Hell might be? Am I on my way there? Are we all on the way to a hugless Hell?

The Pandemic Blues

Norbert Krapf

No matter where I look, no matter where I go, I always hear the pandemic blues ooz outta me. I sing these blues in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening. Can't stop singin' 'em in my darkest dreams. When I turn on the tube, I see a Man with Yellow Hair saying it will not stay. A miracle's gonna take that virus away. Listen to me. You can count on me. You can't count on anybody but *me*!

When I hear him yak, yak I see & hear people I know soundin' sick, soundin' sicker as they fall away from us & never come back. Even to the ones I love, I never have a chance to say goodbye. No chance to say good-byes. The pandemic blues take away friends, take mamas, daddies, sisters, brothers away, grandmas & grandpas, even little babies away, while the Man with Yellow Hair in the big White House says listen to me. Listen only to me & I'll save all of you!

Those I love keep fallin' away. Singing the pandemic blues can't bring 'em back. Mr. Yellow can't bring 'em back. No miracles come. No doctors, no nurses, no nuns, no priests, preachers, no rabbis, no imams can help, no matter how hard & long they work, even all night long. Pandemic's got the power to take everyone & everything away from you & me & all of us while Yellow Hair puffs everything up bigger than real life. His mouth never stops puffing. No wonder so many of us sing the pandemic blues.

If the pandemic blues could ever vote, they might kick Yellow Hair out of the White House. But the pandemic blues are not allowed to vote by mail he says— the mail is corrupt. Something about how you sing is wrong. I suspect you. I don't believe in what you sing. I don't like your blues, it's not my music! Blues can't sing in my house, no! No blues allowed in my house. The blues are too dark. No Devil's music allowed in here! Only Hallelujah music!

The blues make Mr. Yellow's face turn black and blue. Does he think he will die if he opens his ears to the pandemic blues? Does he expect to live in the big house forever? Does he assume he should be buried behind his White House & all of us & our descendants should stand in long lines, kneel at his grave, & pray the Our Father? Me, I'd rather hit the blues highway, sip a brew in a juke joint in the Delta, like Red's in Clarksdale, and open my ears as the blues mamas & papas lift me up & help me heal.

Construction Season

Leah Lederman

Today is foggy and there's construction everywhere around our house, old farm fields turning into warehouses and parking lots. It depresses me.

The air is cool through the windows as I drive my oldest son to middle school. He's talking about the different sounds his trombone makes and looking forward to his writing prompt in English class.

It's light out, though the mornings are growing darker. The sun breaks through the fog and makes the corn and soy look golden. Morning glories grow on the edges of the fields, the little drops of color peeking through like lipstick kisses on tanned, brown faces.

Even though I wish I could love it for being crisp and orange and requiring thick socks with boots, autumn is only a melancholy pathway to winter. Inwardly, I wilt with the sunflowers when the cicadas signal the end of summer, even if I'm a little glad for a break from the heat.

It's only the dread of winter that makes it so miserable. The reality is that it settles in by degrees and it's not so bad, one day at a time. Getting through winter is like when people in history live through hard times. It's just so dark. I read about it and think, "What was it like to live through that?"

The cold, dreary weather is the same as the outlandish and frightening things that happen in history, things that are happening right now: It becomes part of the backdrop as we carry on with our lives.

The best thing for us to do right now is buckle down and plow forward. Twitch later. Hope for spring.

I'll enjoy the snow and the quiet, and if I can make it through February (that bitch), the cold dark months never fail to make the spring that much more sweet. No one could ever convince me to live where it's warm all year round because I couldn't live anywhere without the annual promise of spring.

I think about some of the specific bleak moments I've had since the pandemic hit. The month of March, one long press conference. Deaths and protests, fear and anger; the unknown. The numbers. Uncertainty was the glaze on a shit donut. It got dark, but the

day would always come to an end. No matter how little I slept, the next day came. I'd made it through.

My son and I pull into the car drop-off line and wait for the bell to ring. When it does, he hops out of the car and like every morning, there's a spring in his step on his way into the building.

When they cancelled the schools back in March, effective immediately, it was like the weatherman popping onto your show to tell you a tornado had been spotted. You're gripped with terror but there's a certain thrill in the adrenaline: "This could really be something." As long as it's not your house that gets blown over.

The virus was spreading and people were getting sick. Some of them were dying. I tried to keep things in perspective when my son's birthday and fifth grade graduation plans were derailed. We were safe and healthy. Still, I took it harder than he did. There will be more birthdays, more graduations. Just because he's not having the childhood I envisioned doesn't mean that he's not making it his own, and enjoying it. I hope I'm making the right decision, sending him to the classroom in person.

Students stream into the building alongside him, their eyes are bright but if they're smiling, the masks don't let anyone know. I study the faces of other parents around me, all watching the parade of masked children. The needle wobbles on our collective dial of normalcy. Our sense of certainty about anything has been shattered.

Grocery store aisles are still sparse and sometimes I buy that extra box of bowtie pasta when it's in stock because it hasn't been, the last three trips. Some prices go up, some go down. I apologize to no one in particular when I forget to follow the stickers on the aisles marking "one way" or "stand here to maintain social distance."

I watched the livestreamed funeral mass for the father of my best friend from high school. She and I had just seen each other in February, right before it came to this; in the "before time" when the two of us, and our world, was still intact. COVID-19 claimed her father and I wept at my computer while she read his eulogy to her family and the priests. Everyone in attendance fit in the first two rows.

Maybe these things will make me twitch later on in life; maybe when everything is back to normal, I'll still get nervous when I'm low on bowtie pasta. Something is happening to my constitution; the fibers that make me up are shaping differently. An emotion foreman inside of me is flipping a blueprint upside down and muttering, "Take out the east wall...put up a vestibule. Add a pantry." These changes in my foundations will make my

grandchildren nod at each other and their friends silently, knowingly, “My grandma’s like that, too. She has a closet just for toilet paper.”

I turn on the morning talk radio on my way out of the parking lot and wonder if things will get worse and how. There’s the election to think about, with either side poised to announce their party has somehow ended the pandemic, come November. I turn the radio off. I’m tired.

The weight of it all, the grief of a loss of a way of life, makes me feel like crawling inside a book to hide, and not in the romantic way that book-people capitalize on, churning out cutesy tote bags that say “Reading is my superpower.” I’m talking about the kind of deep reading where you’re not coming up to the surface because the air is too thick and you can’t breathe. Follow the words down to the bottom of the pond and stay there, hope you grow gills. Take up residence in the swamp. On good days, I can prop myself up; good weeks, I’ll even build a dock, but if I look down, I can see the sludge through the cracks.

Fall is not yet here, the crops have not yet been harvested and I’m already hoping for spring, those first clear sunny days that turn around and slap you with an icy rainstorm. The warehouses I drive past on my way home will be finished by then, parking lots filled with the cars like the one that tailgates me the whole last mile to my house. We knew when we moved here that the fields would be built over; there would be change. Eventually, they’d come for our street. “It’s an inevitability.”

One day, I’ll be driving down this same road and see it filled with ugly cement boxes and I’ll remember what was building inside of me when those walls were being erected. I hope I’ll finally understand what foundations were being laid.

I know that what’s building inside of me is better than a cement box. I’m aiming for old Victorian chic, maybe something with “distressed” boards. A place where our face masks are forgotten in an old drawer somewhere, and the pantry shelf is stocked full of bowtie pasta.

Dial “P” for Pandemic

Leah Lederman

I’d been a work-from-home mom for five years when the stay-at-home order came. No big deal, I thought. How bad can it be, to do what I’ve been doing all this time?

It was bad.

One morning, I dialed a wrong number and realized it immediately when a man’s gravelly voice answered, “Hello?” I could tell he was hesitant, too. He didn’t recognize the number but still picked up the phone. That told me he was either a senior citizen or just incredibly lonely, needing something to fill the time. I half-heartedly asked if Christy was there.

No, sorry. You have the wrong number.”

I apologized, and then we both just sat there a moment too long. All the things unsaid, the fears unspoken, questions unasked hanging in the static exchange of breath. And then, “I’m sorry to have bothered you. Have a good day, now.”

The response: “Hey, yeah. You too.”

I hung up the phone and lowered my head, digesting the sensation of being uplifted to hear the voice of someone outside my household but also heartbreakingly lonely, devastated that I’d reached a place where a wrong number qualified as human contact.

My Bleeding Heart

Leah Lederman

The highway is quieter now. Solemn. The trucks sail along, so many metal whales. I'd say they were silent, but it depends on where you're standing. Echoes are funny things. They circle around behind me and come up to tap me on the shoulder.

I lie awake sometimes at 3 am and listen to the wash of truck traffic coming through my bedroom window. I used to do this while I was up nursing babies. Now it's because a virus has shut down the world and I can't sleep. Now it's only the trucks. Cars are at home, even during the normal daytime hours.

I-70, a few hundred yards from my house, is a white wall of sound only ever silenced by the corn crop. On windy days, the roar hits a dozen notes at once. At one interval it's a whisper, then a yawn: There is a constant, benign reminder of its presence coating every second of my day at home. Screaming wind bounces off the tops of the semis, a bassline of rotating tires, the constant rpm of dozens and hundreds and thousands of blood cells moving through this Midwestern stretch of a national artery.

East pulls west and west pulls east. I get up to watch the red and white chain from my window, listening to the sounds of my children breathing; listening to the sound of America breathing.

My first fear, when I heard the numbers for COVID-19, was that the traffic would stop; the rumbling would slow to a trickle then a wheeze, and I would be a firsthand witness to the country bleeding out. I took daily video of the freeway to track the progress and I was elated, at first, to see the trucks coming in greater numbers.

Then I was worried. How long could they carry us?

I rooted for them. On sunny days in early April, I walked with my kids to the end of the road, where we would lean against the fence and arm-honk exhausted drivers. Some of them gave happy little toots in response. Others blared on their horns so long the baby cried (her brothers cheered). Many rolled on by, as silent as their eighteen wheels could carry them.

We tore up old sheets and painted a sign while I researched wind slits and figured out the best way to hang it: "Thank you, Truckers." I took my two boys with me on the four-wheeler to the edge of the field and gave my tears a brisk wipe as I fastened the sign to the fence.

Seeing us, seeing the sign, truckers laid on their horns until the Doppler effect bent the sound. We waved back and my boys yelled, jumping off of the ATV. I prayed this encouragement would sustain the truckdrivers through the miles, long after we were out of view.

To Sushi Bar and Country Music

Sophia Ling

I got my license on the very first day I turned 16. I started driving to school every day, and it was like unlocking a whole new box of mysteries; but at the same time, a list full of responsibilities. Regardless, I loved feeling the light autumn breeze that sliced through my hair when I rolled my windows down and blasted my country music while driving down Keystone Avenue. But the greatest freedom of driving will always be to satiate my addiction to sushi.

It might be that I have an attraction to people who love sushi, but all my friends love sushi. If they didn't, I insisted on driving them to Broad Ripple's Sushi Bar afterschool and introduced them to this Japanese delicacy.

My friends and I frequented Sushi Bar at least once a week, justifying the frequency with pre-concert dinners or pre-swim meet snacks or cravings (it racked up quite the bill). But I became such a regular customer that their phone number is saved on my phone, all of the waiters and waitresses know who I am, and I've had almost every single roll on their menu. I even bragged to my mom and said it was the greatest accomplishment of my life.

I parked in the same spot every time I went to Sushi Bar. My friends and I walked through the back of the store, across the wooden planks, and swung the door open to be greeted by a warm, cozy, ambient lighting and the smell of fresh shrimp, panko breadcrumbs, and the lingering umami taste of sushi.

However, my most frequent order is the birthday roll and the phoenix roll. The birthday roll has tempura shrimp, eel, spicy shrimp, avocado, and crab meat; it's wrapped with soybean paper and topped with spicy mayo and unagi sauce. The phoenix roll is a traditional shrimp tempura, eel, and avocado roll with unagi sauce on top. The first time I had the birthday roll was on my birthday; I remember the soybean paper melting on the roof of my tongue, and the rest of the flavors blended perfectly in a single bite. I almost ordered a second one that day. The phoenix roll, albeit traditional, has its own flair to it. My addiction to tempura shrimp is likely unhealthy – but the crispiness of the shrimp complements the oily avocado taste (I'm not an avocado fan) and makes it the most iconic roll, which I recommend to everyone.

Over time, Sushi Bar became our group tradition. We piled into three cars, rolled down our windows, played Ben Platt or some upbeat throwback pop song from the 2000s, and sung all the way to the restaurant.

However, out of precaution for consuming raw foods during the pandemic, I haven't had sushi since February. It's been eight months since I've had sushi, and I've craved it every single day. But not just the sushi. I crave sitting at a booth in Sushi Bar, taking BuzzFeed quizzes with my friends while waiting for our food, and being comfortable being the most boisterous group there. I crave driving with my friends and singing off-key. I crave spilling embarrassing secrets I'm too scared to share over FaceTime but found really easy to scream about it in a restaurant with all my friends.

I won't say some cheesy mantra about how "it's all about the people you're with," because I can't say that is entirely true. I miss shrimp tempura and fried ice cream. I miss eating two rolls in fifteen minutes and still being hungry afterwards. I miss feeling my chopsticks around the seaweed of the sushi. I miss tasting fresh ingredients in my mouth. But I also miss eating wasabi with one of my closest friends and laughing while watching him cry his eyes out.

Sushi Bar will always be our tradition; for all the things my friends and I disagree on, whether it was music taste or human attractiveness, sushi was the one thing we agreed was the best food in the world and the perfect food to eat on a first date. Since the start of the pandemic, I cherish these memories even more. While it makes me disappointed that there is no certain timeline to which I could return, I know that on my first reunion with my friends, our first trip will be to Sushi Bar. I will blast "Best Day of My Life" by American Authors as I swerve into the backdoor parking lot. I will greet the waiters and waitresses and tell them how much I've missed Sushi Bar. Then I will order a birthday and phoenix roll. Subsequently, I will demand that we make a pit-stop at René's Bakery and I will buy a fruit tart. Then, we will all climb onto the roof of our cars because that's the prime place to feel the wind rush through our hair. I will turn my music up to the loudest it will go (despite my poor music taste) and roll down all my windows so everyone can hear us. Then, I will play Knockin' Boots by Luke Bryan, because every iconic Midwestern high school friend reunion most certainly requires classic country music, out-of-tune singing, French pastries, and Sushi Bar.

Love Transcends Space and Time

Sophia Ling

It's always just been Mom and me. For the last five years, I've gotten used to that idea. Sometimes I get so busy I forget to call Dad for weeks, and sometimes months. When he tells me he misses me, I try not to let him see the tears welling up in my eyes. When I finally call him, though, I get scared. I'm scared of what we may talk about and the things that I'll say that in twenty years, I will regret. I'm scared that I will lose my temper and begin yelling at him for non-trivial things, because then our hour-long conversation will descend into chaos until I cry in anger and hang up on him. He won't call me back after that. We will just leave each other alone until next time. Sometimes we can have amicable conversations, but sometimes we both realize we're jealous of the relationships that our friends have with their children or parents – and then we wonder if and when we will ever get to that stage. But when he casually slips it into conversation, I turn my video off because I long for that relationship too, I'm just far too cowardly to say so. My favorite conversations are always our philosophical ones; for two-hours we manage to bounce off each other's ideas and talk about the future of artificial intelligence and about modern philosophers in China and the US and about happiness.

Dad loves to pass down his life lessons to me – he wants to make sure that I don't make the same mistakes he does. But sometimes I get so tired of listening that I tune him out and try to focus on the rest of my homework I have neglected just to talk to him. Yet every time I hang up after doing this, there is an image and a question that always penetrates to the forefront of my mind: what if he gets into an accident or suddenly has a medical emergency halfway around the world? What if we just had our last conversation and I didn't pay any attention?

We reunite three times a year: Christmas break, spring break, and one Chinese holiday sprinkled in October or November. But mom and I didn't travel back to China for Christmas break during junior or senior year because of college applications. Assuming I would be graduating in May, I wanted to fly back and spend the entire summer with my relatives and Dad. But then China went into lockdown, and "whenever we make it back to China," is tacked onto every phrase we say.

The looming uncertainty and fear keeps me awake at night. The aggravating tensions between the US and China cause my relatives to worry about my future. The WeChat ban simultaneously confuses and worries us: what will happen when we cannot use WeChat anymore?

Dad lives alone in an apartment in Shanghai. It reminds me of our old apartment when we were still there. When we visit him, I sleep in the office and binge movies until I am too tired to stay awake (I managed to watch the entirety of the Fast and Furious franchise in two nights). Then I wake up early to eat breakfast with my parents while memorizing today's subway route and my "tourist" destinations. I spend the next five or six hours taking the subway and visiting historical museums and secluded areas I'd never gone to while living in Shanghai. We eat dinner as a family on the white plastic table; Dad and I drink rice wine together. For some reason, our stays in Shanghai are almost devoid of arguing, the small apartment fills with my music, a Chinese movie playing in the background, our laughter. But the two weeks pass by so quickly that I never fully unpack.

Our family doesn't hug. But if I had known that I wouldn't even know the next time I could see my Dad in person again, I wish I could hug him. I wish I could take him to all the places I've visited in Shanghai on my escapades and show him around. I wish we could find that man who churned Chinese popcorn from a century-old machine again. I wish I could drink rice wine with him and then eat twenty oranges while critiquing a stupid Chinese soap opera.

I still hold out hope for when it is safe enough to return to Shanghai to see my dad again. But for now, I push myself to call dad once a week and focus on every word he says. We have always struggled to listen to each other, but for all the separation during the pandemic has done for us, we have become better listeners.

Progression

Tracy Mishkin

1.

The young died first.
Those who could not keep
their germs to themselves
or would not keep their mouths
shut, tongues sliding together
in ways we envied and despised.

Then the old left us, for we had
nothing they wanted—grandchildren,
hugs, words unmuffled by masks—
all lost as baby teeth.
Sandwich generation, we used to cry,
before we ran out of bread.

2.

We go to some essential job, our faces
swaddled in fear. Or work from home
until they can't afford us anymore.
Then turn up the TV.

Walking the dog feels good.
We shout hello to every stranger,
ask the neighbors if they want the clothing
our dead have left behind.

On our infrequent drives,
the dog rides shotgun.
When we brake hard, we throw out
an arm to stop her from hitting the dash,
the way our fathers tried
to protect us,
remembering a world before seat belts.

3.

The question isn't
how does the world end
but *why does it*
go on.

A Letter to My Grandchild Yet to Be

Cheryl Soden Moreland

Grandma prays you never have to experience what I did in 2020.

A nasty and very contagious disease hit our country—our world—and it turned it upside down and inside out. Your grandma caught the virus (called Covid) and it made me very ill for a long time. I preferred to call it Miss Corona, but she was no lady.

Dark days and darker nights came to visit, bringing with them six-hour naps and nightmares of scary clowns and rabid animals chasing me through jungles of 102 degrees. I felt to be sinking deeper into pits of quicksand I could not escape. I did not invite any of this into my life nor did any of it want to leave.

I hope you never get so sick that you cough 24 hours a day for 14 days straight; that your little tummy never feels like a choo-choo is running through it; that you never become so weak and short of breath that you keep falling down and can't get back up unless Mommy or Daddy helps you.

People of all ages and in all nations were becoming very sick, and many were dying. Even their doctors and nurses were becoming sick and dying, too. Children couldn't go to school for months because they had closed due to the risk of catching such a deadly bug from classrooms and playgrounds. Sometimes parents who didn't have a job to go to would teach their children from home. Brothers and sisters got to spend a lot more time together—whether they wanted to or not. Family pets liked having their humans home with them all the time for many months (well, except for some kitty cats) as they got spoiled with lots of snuggling and extra treats. But grandparents didn't get to visit with their grandchildren because they were older and could catch the virus easily, so phone calls and visits on their computers had to be the norm for the time until the virus went away. And eventually it did, but until then we all had to go about our lives in a whole different way. It changed the way we did things from then on. Life would never be the same.

Grandma learned a lot during that year, and I would like to tell you that whenever your life feels like you just can't go on much longer, things do get better. There will always be someone around to help you through the roughest of times, and don't be afraid or shy about asking them for help. But most of all, just know that you are strong on your own and can overcome anything, just like Grandma did. Think good thoughts. Read good books. Make time to play and have fun, even when you are feeling sick or sad. When I was a little girl, I was raised to pretend that I was a dog wagging its tail whenever I

would feel bad, for a wagging tail means a happy doggy! And I found myself soon feeling better! Sometimes when we act like we are happy, we become happy!

I imagine your life after this memorable year to be one of sunshine, lollipops and rainbows—just like a song Grandma used to sing as a kid. You will get to go to school and be with your friends and teachers and learn as much as you can and have fun doing it. You can eat out at your favorite restaurants and go out for ice cream cones with your Mom and Dad and play with your neighbor friends and compete in all kinds of sports after school. But most of all you will learn that life does go on, in spite of bad things happening—sometimes to good people. You can be one of those good people who makes good things happen...to everyone. And I pray, no more pandemics for at least another hundred years.

Love, your granny

Wellington: Covid-19 Celebrity
Lylanne Musselman

Shedd Aquarium's social media posts are proof. When the guests are away, the penguins will play! – Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the rockhopper penguin Wellington strolls through the empty Shedd Aquarium taking in flashy sights, like the silvery disk tetras darting around beside his reflection. Other penguins, such as bonded pair, Annie and Edward, examine a pod of dolphins. These penguins seem to engage with the other creatures they see on their excursions. Wellington is obsessed with the fishes of the Amazon Rising. The black-barred silver dollars gather at their window, interested in their unusual visitor. The more experienced penguins can wander for longer periods of time, occasionally helping younger birds experience new things, like the gift shop, where they peer at likenesses of themselves on t-shirts or stuffed toys. All penguins naturally show curiosity about novelties. At 32, Wellington, curious and calm, has lived double the life expectancy of his species. He waddles up and watches a beluga whale boop the glass as his greeting. Wellington then hops over to Annie, and her beau, Edward. It brings joy to see these three parade around the aquarium, free of boundaries. As we shelter at home, unable to wander far ourselves, we welcome these birds into our lives watching their antics on Twitter. Humans staying away allows these penguin pals free time to discover and explore their home in slow hops and waddles.

Once Upon a Time in a Stray America

Lylanne Musselman

There was a plague that set upon the land. All animals had to make themselves scarce if they wanted to survive; if they went outside they could get the scourge from invisible droplets floating in the air or waiting for them on counters, on their mail, or from those animals that refused to wear masks, swearing it all “a hoax.” Those were the sheep that followed everything the fox and its minions spouted: “Virus smirus, it’s all fake news! Virus smirus, fake news we say! It’s those demo-rats that are trying to get you to stay inside, lose all your money, lose your liberty, lose your freedom. Believe us, it is nothing more than a seasonal cold or flu...you are patriots, like our royal orange sun! You heard him: ‘Fe, fi, fo, fum...you need to work, make our economy run! You are tough! Send your ewes to school! Let prissy sheeple shelter at home, live in fear, while we go out and live our lives this year!” The so-called demo-rats and prissy sheeple believed in science and stayed home, going out only for pizza slices or getting home deliveries. They let their roots show. They went old school with tree leaves once toilet paper got scarce. They grew their own carrots, cabbage, and corn and saved their cow cousins from slaughterhouses. Meanwhile, royal orange hind-ness and his followers who all refused to wear masks caught the plague. The fox and his friends didn’t know what to do when their flock started falling over in the streets and the fields, and no one was there to tell them what to misconstrue. Many months later, the wiry scientists came up with a vaccine that allowed the demo-rats and prissy sheeple, who had been so patient and believed in them, to leave their shelters, eat their pizzas in the streets, and live their lives happily ever after for years and years.

Seeking Comfort in a Pandemic

Lylanne Musselman

I think of Grandma a lot on any given day, but in the surreal times we're living in: the pandemic sweeping over us, our certainty unmasked, the social distancing, the empty grocery shelves, I long for her hugs. I yearn for her upstairs bedroom full of goodies she kept there. A child of the Great Depression, Grandma always shopped to stock up. If here, I'd need not worry about making grocery runs for staples. I could walk a block down the street to her house for rolls of paper towels, toilet paper, bags of sugar, cans of coffee, boxes of Kleenex, bottles of rubbing alcohol, piles of colorful braided throw rugs. All kinds of aspirin, Tums, and bottles of paregoric, her cure-all for stomach aches. I never knew until recently it contained opiates. She also had 16 oz. bottles of Coca-Cola always in supply. In her freezer, bacon, round steaks, and boxes of Maple Cremes and Mint Meltaways; her plentiful stash of Lowery's chocolate candies, handmade in Muncie. My daughter said, "Don't you wish Grandma was still here? If we'd run out of something, we could just go to her house and restock." We reminisced her hoarding ways. I wondered if this moment in time will instill that need in our younger generations to stock up whenever they can because they'll remember those bare shelves at the grocery and the sudden unknowing of what the future holds.

Cross-Country Road Trip During the Pandemic

Jeff Rasley

When my wife Alicia and I began our annual road trip from Indianapolis to Los Angeles on March 12, the corona-virus pandemic was still considered a “China problem”. There were cases in Washington State, but it seemed likely the virus would be contained within the Seattle area.

We would drive nowhere near to Washington State on our planned route and Seattle is over 1,100 miles from LA. Nevertheless, we added two surgical masks, a large container of disinfectant wipes, and bottles of hand-sanitizer to our baggage.

Our first destination was Kansas City. News reports on the radio about the spread of the corona virus were a little worrisome as we drove across Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. But traffic on I-70 was normal. No one seemed to be particularly concerned about the corona virus at the gas and food stops we made along I-70. There was an outdoor concert in the Power and Light District that night we planned to attend. When we arrived, we discovered it had been canceled. But the restaurants in downtown KC were open and no particular precautions were being taken by servers or patrons.

We stopped in Manhattan, Kansas, the next day for a walking tour of Kansas State University. The 19th Century castle-like limestone buildings in the center of the campus gave Alicia and me an eerie feeling. Not because of the architecture, but because we were the only people walking around the campus. All the buildings were locked up. It was spring break, but campuses don’t become ghost towns during a normal break in the academic calendar.

As we drove west, the scenery changed from the flat and rolling farmlands of the Midwest to the Flint Hills of Kansas and then the high plains of eastern Colorado. We were disappointed to find the 19-mile Pikes Peak Highway closed. Santa's North Pole near the entrance to the highway was also closed, so we couldn’t ride the highest (elevation 7,500 feet) Ferris Wheel in the world. No signs explained the closures.

But in Colorado Springs, Downtown and Old Town were happening places. Lots of people were walking the streets, shopping, hanging out in coffee houses, and dining out. Notices around the UC Colorado Springs campus stated that classes were temporarily cancelled to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, but many students were walking around and hanging out. The dining center, Café 65, was open to the public and serving food cafeteria-style. A poster at the entrance urged diners to wash their hands to reduce the risk of infection. That warning prompted Alicia and I to begin washing our

hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer every time we touched anything outside of our car. And we repeatedly washed every surface of the car that we touched with disinfectant wipes.

We spent the night at Cottonwood Hot Springs and Spa outside of Buena Vista, Colorado. The Spa had several overnight guests and even more visitors with day-passes to soak in the hot springs. Fear of the virus floated away while I gazed up at a starlit sky suspended in a 110-degree spring-fed pool. Yet, for the first time on the trip, I felt reluctant to be physically close to a stranger. I remained on the other side of the pool while sharing tales of trekking and climbing in Nepal with a shaggy-bearded old hippie.

After a morning soak in the hot springs, we drove by Mt. Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado at 14,439 feet. It is one of a cluster of fourteeners around Leadville, the highest city in Colorado at 10,142 feet. Radio news reported an outbreak of the virus in Colorado, but all of the stores and restaurants were open for business in Leadville.

News channels on our car's radio broadcast increasingly alarming reports about the virus spreading to New York and other states outside of the Northwest. Still, Alicia and I felt safe from exposure driving through White River National Forest and Glenwood Springs. We pulled off the road for several scenic views of pristine trout streams with white-capped peaks in the distance. We made a picnic lunch on the bank of the Colorado River. Late in the afternoon, we hiked the Serpent's Trail in Colorado National Monument. We drove toward a pastel sky of orange, then red and violet as the sun sank behind distant hills on the way to Moab, Utah.

Cars and pedestrians were out on Main Street when we arrived that evening. We walked around town awhile and settled on the Moab Diner for a late dinner. A handwritten poster requested patrons not to sit next to a table occupied by other diners. We complied.

Other than that slight inconvenience, in four days of travel we had encountered no problems booking motels, fueling the car, purchasing any needed items, and dining in restaurants. That changed on March 16.

We spent the morning driving and hiking around the other-worldly Arches National Park. The Park was crowded with vehicles, hikers, and bike riders. There were no warnings at the park entrance about maintaining distance from other hikers. But, after listening to hourly reports about the spread of the virus, we instinctively stepped away from other people on the trails. I climbed a few boulders on one of the trails, and then wondered

whether other hands could leave the virus on rocks I touched. I carefully washed my hands before returning to the car and then cleaned the door handles, steering wheel, and controls with a disinfectant wipe. I also began to be very careful not to touch my face, wipe my eyes or nose, unless I first washed my hands.

Meanwhile, every restaurant in Moab had closed to inside dining while we were exploring the wonderland of Arches. For the first time, we were forced to order takeout. Customers were still allowed to enter and order inside restaurants, but you were not allowed to eat inside.

Alicia and I debated whether we should proceed on to LA or return to Indiana. We were asymptomatic and there were no reported cases in Indy when we left home. So, we felt confident we were not infected. We decided to drive on, but to be even more vigilant in taking precautions to protect ourselves and others as best we could.

We spent that night in a cabin at the Whispering Springs Motel in Hanksville, Utah. Stan's Burger Shack was open and serving food without any restrictions. Alicia and I chose a table distant from the other diners. Before we tucked into our order of burgers, fries, and shakes, we wiped the bag, wrapping, and paper cups with disinfectant.

The Visitor Center at Capitol Reef National Park was closed, but a petite ranger with ruddy cheeks and blond hair greeted visitors and handed out brochures about the park. She cheerfully opined that being outdoors in a national park was one of the best places to be during a pandemic. "Visitors to the park can avoid groups of people and it's good for your mental health!"

Alicia and I are not gamblers (maybe with life, but not money), so we are not really "Vegas people". But we thought it would be interesting to see what was happening in Las Vegas in that early stage of the pandemic. The Strip and Downtown were lit up as if nothing had changed. But on March 17, the day before we arrived, all of the casinos had closed. Still, cruisers on The Strip backed up traffic for a mile the night of March 18. Some strip clubs refused to close but adapted their illuminated signs to advertising "hand-sanitizer nude wrestling" and "corona virus free stripping and table dances".

We arrived in LA on March 19 to spend a few days with our son Andrew, daughter-in-law Halima, and their puppy. Mayor Garcetti issued an order that night closing most businesses. It felt like the cascading effect of the virus was chasing us across the country. There were no reported fatalities yet in LA, but around 100 people had been infected. Plans to make side-trips to visit friends at their vineyard in Santa Barbara and in Lake Tahoe were cancelled. Dinners and a beach party were cancelled.

Each of the eleven days we were in LA, Andrew, Halima, Alicia, and I took long walks. We walked around the campuses of UCLA, USC, and Santa Monica College and the Walk of Fame in Hollywood. We walked the beach in Venice and Santa Monica, and Andrew and I rode bikes on the 8.5-mile trail from Venice to Manhattan Beach. We hiked the trails and marveled at the 40-foot Paradise Waterfall in Wildwood Park, Ventura County.

Venice Beach is ordinarily a weird and wonderful place to hang out. Homeless dumpster divers mix with TV and movie stars. It has a carnival ambience with buskers playing guitars, artisans hawking their wares, and hustlers selling CDs. Boom boxes blare and strangers give each other high and low fives as skateboarders and roller-bladers whiz by. But not the week of March 22, 2020.

A few surfers were in the water every day. A fair number of people walked, biked, or skated on the boardwalk and beach path, but numbers were well down from what I'd experienced in previous visits. The paddle tennis and basketball courts and skate park were open and in use until March 27, when crime tape was put up to prohibit play. The shops along the boardwalk were closed, except for restaurant take-out, a marijuana dispensary, and a vaping store. Some of the street artists, who live in tents on the boardwalk, had no place to go, so they remained, but were not allowed to sell their works. Muscular joggers, drag queens, and raggedy bums still roamed Venice Beach, but everyone carefully stepped aside rather than acknowledge a fellow human being with a smile, wave, or handout. Fear of infection drove the fun-loving spirit off the boardwalk and beach path.

What we experienced on the 2,200-mile drive back to Indy was similar to the last two days before arriving in LA. Motels and gas stations were open as were restaurants for takeout. We spent a night in Tusayan, the village just outside Grand Canyon National Park, and spent a day hiking the Rim Trail and driving through the park. Alicia and I had one of the most awesome sights on the planet almost to ourselves.

We tried to visit Petrified Forest National Park, but the gate was closed. We stood on a corner in Winslow, Arizona, and made stops in other towns along Rte. 66, like Holbrook, Arizona, and Tucumcari, New Mexico, that look like movie sets from the 1950s. The gate to Cadillac Ranch, just west of Amarillo, Texas was chained, but we could see the line of upended Cadillacs from the highway. We shared the sacred space at the Alfred P. Murrah Building Memorial in Oklahoma City with a security guard and a solitary duck.

Our last stop was Garden of the Gods Recreational Area in the Shawnee National

Forest in southern Illinois. The gate at the park entrance was closed. But a backpacker walked around it, so, while Alicia guarded the car, I jogged up the 1.5-mile hilly road to take the last photos of our road trip along the scenic Observation Trail.

Before we got home on April 4th, Indianapolis had been designated a “hot spot” for COVID-19 infections. The virus had already killed 125 Hoosiers, and 4,400 had tested positive. Fatalities and cases were increasing, not leveling off. Once there, we “hunkered down” by order of the Governor. Yet, potential carriers of the virus shopped in grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, liquor stores, cigarette shops, and other “essential” businesses. On the road, Alicia and I were rarely in close contact with other people. We washed our hands before and after touching anything handled by another person, including takeout orders, motel keys, and gas-pump handles. We wiped with disinfectant every surface we thought another person might have touched, including restaurant and motel door handles, counter-tops, and faucets. On hikes we avoided close contact with other hikers. When we were traveling, much of our time was spent sheltered-in-place within our 4-door Altima. Back home in Indiana we felt less safe than on the road.

Despite the fear of COVID-19, driving by picturesque farms, winding rivers, and rolling hills, crossing the mighty Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, feeling the desolation of the Flint Hills and Mojave Desert, passing by sparkling trout streams and through the majestic Rockies, and gazing across the awe-inspiring Grand Canyon—just looking out of car windows on an American road trip—was a fantastic experience. It was a wonderful antidote to the depressing statistics and personal losses caused by the pandemic.

Waiting for the Fever

Jeremy Richard

Out in the open, I wouldn't be scared of a wasp or a hornet but put me in a 6 X 9 box with a hornet and I'd crap my pants. That's how it felt to be locked in prison with Covid-19.

On March 19, the dorm I was housed in at Angola Prison was put on reverse isolation. I was in a medical dorm, full of elderly, frail people who couldn't commit a crime even if they wanted to. I remember being called in from work, all of the wardens at the front of the dorm, dressed in khakis and black shirts.

"Okay. For the safety of our most fragile inmate population, we are putting Ash 2 on reverse isolation to protect y'all from the Corona Virus. We will do everything in our power to keep you safe."

Two days later, an older Cuban man fell ill and was taken out of the dorm. Two days after that, they told us he did, indeed, have Covid-19.

So, there we were, eight-five men locked in a box and the hornet was among us. We were freaking out, trying to figure out how the virus had got in the dorm. We were making masks and washing our hands until they were dry and scaly. But with the beds double-bunked and only four feet between each rack, we couldn't social distance.

No one else fell ill for a few weeks. We were actually starting to think the coast was clear when people started coming down with fevers so fast that at the time it just seemed like a blur. At one point, we had twenty-seven people missing from the dorm, all having to leave because they came down with the Corona Virus and showed symptoms. At this point, we stopped trying. We quit wearing our masks and I came up with a funny saying. If someone asked what I was doing, I'd say, "Waiting on the fever." What else could I do? We didn't have a chance. A lot of the security weren't following their own rules. Many of them wouldn't wear masks when they came to the dorm.

Four of the people who contracted the Corona Virus in my dorm died. One of my elderly friends, Bobby, who came down with the virus was in a cell on the hospital ward with one of the guys who died. When he finally got better and got back to the dorm, he told me how horrible Raymond's last days were.

Raymond would get out of the bed and fall. The inmate orderlies would get mad because they'd have to help him up. One day, Raymond fell, and they wouldn't help

him. He cried out to his elderly, wheelchair-bound roommate. "Help me, Bobby." But Bobby could barely sit up by himself. My friend Bobby told me, near tears, that Raymond's cries for help while he lay dying on the floor will haunt him forever. Even after Raymond died, it took hours for the staff to remove his body from the cell. I can't even begin to imagine how Raymond felt, alone, abandoned, left to die on the floor like a roach.

Months after the height of the Corona Virus in our dorm, we were finally tested. We all tested negative. But I'm pretty sure it's because we'd already had the virus but were asymptomatic and were over it by the time we were tested. No one else came down with the virus and Louisiana, seven months after the pandemic started, began moving into Phase Three, so the wardens started moving a bunch of us around. I was moved out of the medical dorm. A young, healthy person, I shouldn't have been there in the first place. Now I'm on the outside looking in, while my old dorm remains on reverse isolation. I see my old roommates every day. A lot of the people still in the dorm aren't patients and hate that. Just because they're in the medical dorm, they have to be locked down. Hell, I hated it. I just hope a vaccine will come along and turn the Corona Virus into a bad memory.

As Whole Cities Burn

April Ridge

As whole cities burn, we sip our morning coffee and nonchalantly hope for better days for our friends out west.

We ready ourselves for work, some in business casual, some in sweatpants or no pants at all.

We ready our progeny for a day of learning. What is best for our nation of children, to send them to school in masks, hoping they are safe in gaining their education, or to keep them at home, learning via Zoom meetings and telephone?

We feel sadness for those souls living with Covid all alone.

As the masses collect sundry items, hoarding compulsively these supplies that may very well last them a lifetime: the 2500 pack of cotton swabs, the 18-count paper towel roll...how do they define me as a person?

Does this hysterical feeling of being unprepared abate at some point? Does it gallop off into the distant horizon or must this fight-or-flight feeling pervade every moment I am barely breathing in, avoiding sharing air with anyone within six feet of me?

The stigma of death as a horrific event is already ingrained in the mind, and to live through this time is a fearful way to go. Yet if you die right now, there's no possibility of a truly honorable funeral. We are scared to live yet scared to die; unsure of where to step without disturbing a landmine.

Echoes

April Ridge

The mind echoes constantly with these questions that remain unanswered so many days after the beginning of this sickness the country is facing.

This vaccine that is purported to be coming “sometime very soon”: will it be effective?

Will it save us from our homes, from our bored doom, from our constant worry for our frail and tired-of-waiting relatives?

Will this vaccine be a long-term solution, or are the creators merely taking shortcuts to make its issuance a faster, more convenient plausibility?

Will it be free to begin with, and if not, will insurance companies and benefactors make the nation’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens a priority?

I have not hugged anyone that lives outside my home in 199 days, since Leap Year Day at a birthday party for my younger brother.

I celebrated my birthday with my own two-layer buttercream carrot cake at home with my mate, we stress ate what normally the entire family would share in two days.

Holidays are currently spent coordinating Zoom meetings, ensuring the elders in the family understand which button to push, how to enable the video option on screens hundreds of miles and many missed embraces away.

We celebrate our victories, mourn our dead via computer screen and phone call, fingers crossed the poor rural region signal doesn’t drop.

At the beginning of this virus invading the nation, my eldest aunt died.

My entire family shocked, yet numb in our surprise, for these were the beginning of the oddest of times.

There has been no funeral, no wake, no celebration of life party with family standing over the most aggrieved members of the clan.

No consoling of the youngest of the tribe who don’t understand the sadness, the absent-minded mothers and fathers blinded by a strange grief.

How does one process grief for something so removed, as an untouched, unwashed body? How do we lay our loved ones to rest, and best serve their memory when even ten of us in a room together is a risk?

In the midst of this health crisis there are also movements stirring at the margins and starting to make a strong appearance in the daily lives of those who aim for equal rights.

The changes in the times, the necessary wearing of mask and shield simultaneously pulls at both sides.

Protests and riots rage in the streets: anger at the police, at the civil services, at the way most people of color are being treated.

Fear, anger, love, joy, confusion, these are prominent themes you can see in the streets.

The overwhelming feeling of loss and helplessness sweeps through a nation of people standing unsure on their feet. Logic kneels and weeps.

What Was, May Never Be Again.

Patricia Russell

I took a weeklong vacation from my desk job. I programmed data and met with vendors for my company, a midsized grocery store chain. I had worked at this job for over 40 years. I started as a teen and went to college while working. I obtained my degree and worked my way into a decent job in the company's IT department. My vacation was in March, 2020. It was while I was on vacation that the governor issued a statewide lockdown. I was confined to my home. I could go in my backyard but being among people was not an option during this time. I was with my spouse and college age son, so I wasn't alone. Not being able to go out was rather depressing. We watched television, listened to music, played games and read. Because I was in an essential business, I had a job to return to. However, much to my surprise everything changed. No longer was I at a desk job using my professional skills. Suddenly I was thrust into a completely different work environment. Due to everything being closed, we were one of the few places where people could get essentials. As a temporary move, I was assigned to stocking everything and anything the store carried. It was a labor-intensive job but since it was temporary, I put my heart into it. I enjoyed being able to be physically active while helping customers.

It is now September of 2020. I have been informed that the position I held for over four decades had been shifted to our corporate office. This temporary job became permanent. I, of course, am grateful to have a job but it is a massive change for me. It is almost like starting over from the beginning. "This is the new normal" I was told. I do understand the idea behind this. I also realize that some businesses were taking advantage of the situation by cutting back on overhead. Sadly, however, nonessential businesses had no choice but to cut back. Therefore, I understood that my situation could have been worse.

My life is nothing like it has been or ever will be again. Being closer to retirement age than not, a change in employment wouldn't be helpful. I went to school in order to better myself and feel cheated somehow. At the same time, I find the daily human connections to be rather enlightening. The physical work, albeit tiring, keeps me in better shape. I mean, it's crucial to look at it from all angles. In addition, everyone I encounter has had changes. Some more drastic than others. Not being in a position where I was able to use my knowledge and skills took some getting used to. In spite of that, I was humbled. I am no better than the janitor and no worse than the corporate executive. I spent my years seeing everything in a hierarchy. So did those around me. People are given respect or lack thereof according to their positions. It doesn't matter that I had many decades in a corporate job. It doesn't matter that I have a degree. In the end, does any

of that matter? I mean, we're all in this together. We're all inhabitants of the beautiful planet. No matter how much we think we are better, different or worse than someone else, we really aren't. Every individual has their own story. No one can truthfully know what another person has survived. I don't know anyone who doesn't learn something from their choices. People tend to take one of two paths. They either evolve or they become more ingrained in their beliefs. Everyone makes mistakes but we shouldn't be condemned for them.

We should work together toward the betterment of the planet using our own special abilities. We can't judge someone from their past, their job, their religion, their race, their clothing or any other number of societal norms. As I come home tired from a day of lifting heavy things and working among decent human beings, I imagine a world where people are able to live the good life side by side. A world where people can see the beauty in each sunrise or in a child's laughter. A world where grudges, hate and judgement are gone and replaced with true peace.

For me, anyway, the world is a new adventure. It is different for sure, but life is what you make it. I take notice of the little things more than ever before. I truly enjoy my days now. Before it was a routine monotony. Now, I never know what will come up each day. I still do some minor computer work but overall my life is drastically different. I have made peace with that. It could have gone so much worse. My wish is for people to remove the dark shades of indifference and reproach. Instead, I hope the world can see through the shades of tolerance and empathy.

In the End

Christina Williams Sauter

It will split you into a million bright shining pieces
and cast you onto the floor of a shallow sea.

And the sound of the waves will rub off your hardened edges
and your sharp corners will grow smooth and cool and easy to touch.

And the movement of the great water will turn your angles into curves
and you will not be what you once were.

You will be moved.
You will be changed.
You will be a vast and complicated system
of moving parts
that make a brand-new sound
in an old world
that needs your song.

Butterflies and Bees

John Schleeter

The first eight months of the year 2020 have offered many opportunities to lose hope and become discouraged. Wildfires in California and Colorado, historic hurricanes along the Gulf of Mexico occurring prior to the normal hurricane season that begins in September, angry and disappointing political rancor flooding the airwaves and social media, racial strife throughout the country often followed by unrest and violence in the streets of America, plus the unbelievable Corona Virus Pandemic affecting millions world-wide and impacting the United States especially hard,

With all of these horrendous issues occupying our daily lives, it has become nearly impossible to remain hopeful, let alone safe, healthy and out of harm's way. We have attempted to remain safe. We have attempted to remain hopeful. We have spent hours in prayer asking our God to heal our nation and the world. Our faith and hope seem to rise and fall, but we continue to hold on. We seek out goodness, healing and peace by showing love towards our family, friends and the "other"! We find relief in nature, in relationships, in reading, writing and enjoying movies and documentaries.

Regarding nature, over the last few years we have been planting various flowers and bushes that have the benefit of attracting butterflies and bees. Last summer we derived so much joy and pleasure as the plants attracted numerous bees and butterflies. Early this Spring, we were again excited to see the butterfly plants come to life after their winter of rest. At approximately ten to twelve inches in height and width, the plants were well on their way to growing into large bushes.

As news of the Corona Virus was becoming more dire, our area was struck by a severe wind and hailstorm. We were relieved that our plants survived the storm, but soon we, along with most of our neighbors, discovered that the majority of our roofs were severely damaged, requiring total roof replacements. In mid-April the roofing contractors arrived to replace our entire roof---a very messy project. Our yard became cluttered with roofing debris. After the cleanup, we sadly discovered that our beautiful plants were crushed. Crushed and broken to the extent that we felt little hope that they would survive. We became discouraged.

So many issues of chaos in our lives and now we were to lose one of the bright spots remaining to lift our spirits – the sight of butterflies and bees gracing our garden space. As we stared at the damaged remains, a dear friend stopped by to say hello. We will refer to him as Matt. As we pointed out to Matt the destruction of our precious plants, he

calmly asked two questions: “Are you two losing hope, and number two, can I borrow your pruner?”

Upon handing him our pruner, he gently snipped the damaged sprouts, pruning them down to one-two inches in height. “Never lose hope, the injured plants will prosper in spite of these times of discouragement”, he said.

While we wanted to believe Matt, we remained a bit skeptical. Yet each day, we watered and nurtured these struggling plants following Matt’s advice. Within a few weeks we began to see new growth. The plants were going to survive, just as he had promised. Week after week the plants continued to grow. Occasionally a bee would appear. No butterflies, but many bees. Our hopefulness was quickly rising.

It is now the end of August, 2020. Matt was correct. The plants have survived. They now measure approximately 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide, a size much larger than during the previous year. But most important, each day we rejoice as we observe nature’s beauty, as we observe hundreds of bees and beautiful Monarch butterflies covering the expanse of our happy place.

While we were tempted to lose hope, we listened to the wisdom and advice of our friend Matt. His inspiration was powerful and timely. We needed his words. We needed a reason for hopefulness. The year 2020 has not been easy, but our lives have been blessed by the joy and excitement of the miracles of nature. Some chaotic issues in 2020 still exist in our lives but observing our little garden friends on a daily basis has softened their impact and given us the courage to move joyfully forward.

Love in a Time of Corona
Mary Sexson

(With Apologies to Gabriel Garcia Marquez)
Early March

Not too close, but
if it's the same partner
you've always had, okay.
Not a good idea
to visit your granny
at the retirement center,
or your mother, for that matter.
No crowded bars, either.
Think smart people!
Social distancing is the term,
right, for what we're supposed
to do? Gloves on,
manners off as you elbow
(much safer) your way
through the cleaning product
and toilet paper aisles.

Maybe
you really don't need
to hoard 19 cans of soup,
or freeze that side of beef.
Maybe wash your hands
a little longer, don't go
to any weddings, cancel
that reunion and just sit
the hell down on your couch
in your living room in your
house, and stay, gloves off now
and flip your TV to Netflix.
Breathe in through the mouth,
out through the nose, but
for god's sake, don't touch your face!

Close

Mary Sexon

Late March

Breaking the bonds of protocol
we whisper to each other

right before we go up
to bed we stand close

defying the rules
shattering the isolation

risking ourselves to feel
the closeness of skin to skin

wrist to arm hand to face
the feel of you on me.

What He Said

Mary Sexson

April

Did you hear what he said
about testing? That it was being done
here better than anywhere else, ever.

Did you hear what he said
about the virus, that it might just
disappear, like magic?

Did you hear what he said
about the reporter who asked
that nasty question?

Did you hear what he said
about the federal government, it has done a lot,
and it's going to do a lot?

Did you hear what he said
about the fake news and that
the virus was just another hoax?

Did you hear what he said
about how he was handling the pandemic,
that it was perfect?

Did you hear what he said
about Sleepy Joe?
Crazy Bernie?
Crooked Hillary?
Cheatin' Obama?
Pocahontas and Nervous Nancy?

Did you hear what he said?

Hanging Out with Joy

Laurel Smith

An old clothesline stands sentinel in our back yard, and early each year, including this Covid spring, I wipe it off and adjust the tension so it can be used through the warm months. During lockdown one sunny day in April, I sorted an ungainly mound of dirty clothes into warm and cold loads then realized I could take our sheets and pillowcases out to the line. I had to smile. The homely ritual of doing laundry in our basement had droned through another winter, a winter that marked the arrival of a global pandemic, not just cold, gray days. Yet even a frightening disease and its equally frightening fallout could not stop the return of spring, nor could it derail my happy impulse to hang linens on the line to dry.

How can anyone admit to a “happy impulse” in a crisis? What permutation of survivor’s guilt prompts such a thing? I’m optimistic by nature but my optimism must sustain itself in the full sun of suffering and success. In the moment I attach a wooden pin to cotton on the clothesline, a father dies, a grandfather dies a hundred times over; in the moment a toddler laughs, a woman is shot in her bed. Paradox is the essence of life, seemingly as regular as breathing. Hurricanes blast years of work into death and ruin while neighbors share food and sew homemade masks to fit a child’s face, making another lesson about how we help each other. How we hold each other, even at a distance.

My first memory of a clothesline has nothing to do with laundry. Here it is: my younger sister, Edie, and I are playing outdoors at my grandmother’s house, a small one-story with large yard in Muncie, Indiana. It is summer—a phenomenally long season when you are six- and seven-year-olds. My mother is shopping or spending time with a friend or enjoying some space without kids while we are playing here at Grandma’s. Grandma Reynard, happily single at 57, is a teacher, with plenty of logged playground-duty hours in addition to parenting and grandparenting experience. So when Edie and I begin to exhaust the novelty of our usual backyard activities, Grandma is ready to accommodate our restless rivalry before it turns from amiable play to sibling squabbles.

“Girls,” Grandma calls from the kitchen window, “we need to talk about lunch.”

Food, a good diversion for restless children. But we’ve already talked about lunch. We will be having egg salad sandwiches, sliced peaches, and fresh lemonade. In fact, earlier that morning I proposed to help Grandma make more lemonade so that Edie and I could set up a “Lemonade For Sale” stand at the end of her driveway. One of at least a dozen proposals, but for today, the backyard draw prevails.

“Is it time to eat now?” asks Edie.

“No, silly,” I answer before Grandma can reply, employing my best older sister voice, “because we aren’t eating lunch until Mom gets here.”

“I want to ask you about the best place for eating your lunch,” says Grandma.

Edie and I look at each other.

“Won’t we eat at the table?” I ask, normal voice restored. No sign of a bossy sibling when a fond routine is at risk.

“You *could* eat at the table,” Grandma says thoughtfully. “Or you could have a backyard tent-picnic.”

The best choice is obvious.

“Let’s have a tent-picnic!” exclaim Edie and I together, though we have never experienced a tent-picnic before.

“Well, then, we’ll need to work together.”

The picnic pieces come out—basket, plastic plates and cups, napkins, an old quilt to lay on the ground. All the accessories of outdoor eating are familiar to us from take-out at the city park to pitch-ins at family reunions to a cooler packed for an all-day outing at Prairie Creek. But what about the tent?

Ever the resourceful farm girl, Grandma brings a large sheet, heavy string, wooden stakes, and a hammer into the backyard. She loosens the tension on the nylon clothesline and hangs the sheet across the line so the edges of cloth barely touch the grass. Then Edie and I take turns holding the four corners of the sheet close to the ground as we open the walls of our tent-in-the-making. Oh, happy clothesline that can create a tent! Grandma knots the corners of the sheet with string, hammers the stakes at each corner, and ties the string to the stakes. Finally, our tent is assembled. Once lunch is underway, we wave to Grandma back at her kitchen window, the two of us giggling, ensconced on a quilted floor with the best lunch in Delaware County.

As a girl growing up on her parents’ farm in Henry Township, my grandmother lived through the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. Though she survived, her father, her oldest brother and an infant nephew did not. Life changed drastically with her father’s death

and the loss of the farm. But her life wasn't over: Grandma Reynard lived to be 100. As a spry 87-year-old retiree, she came for a visit and helped me wallpaper my kitchen. I made egg salad for our lunch. We both agreed that the long ago "tent-picnic day" was more than fun—it was joyful.

Joy is unexpected. Surrounded by dirty laundry, I did not plan to smile on that April day during lockdown. But I am grateful for that fleeting smile. There are so many jobs we do not ask for, including our role as witness to history even as we live it. Our work at this job includes the painful witness of trauma, but a chronicle of crises will always be an incomplete account. With courage and hope, a record of affirmation emerges, too—that other chronicle of human life. When we listen to the blended tales of pain and affirmation, it is difficult to miss the witness of joy. In a crisis, a joyful memory and a smile may be the only way to tell it.

Self-Care with Toddler, in Quarantine
Elisabeth Giffin Speckman

Wiggle the wild
onions to raise them
by the root. Show him
The bulbs, round and white.
Allow the dirt to settle underneath
The nails he never lets you trim.
Introduce the worm. Applaud the dried leaf,
the twig, the dandelion he rubs in his hair.
Spritz his cheeks with sunshine, cloud cover.
See his legs grow sturdier each day.
See his hair curl in the heat. See his mouth curl at the lip
of the bottle. See the prism
in the water as it falls. See the ground drink
it up even as he sighs, "Ahh,"
even as it dries up, even
as he cries more, cries again,
You promise him
Tomorrow.

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**A Short Play by
Elisabeth Giffin Speckman**

Inspired by the New York Times' front page, May 24, 2020

THE AMERICAN

There's something about a list of names that makes me uneasy.

Together, so many names don't seem real.

Whether on a guest list or a seating chart or a wall—or a newspaper front page that continues on page 12, too many names together overwhelm me.

I've never been a numbers person. I can't walk into a room and tell you how wide it is or how many feet are between me and the door or how many bodies I see.

Bodies.

It boils down to bodies.

I am a body. You are a body. Your children, your mother, your cousin.

I'm reminded of that game we used to play in the car: hold your breath whenever you pass a cemetery. Bad luck if you don't, so when you see one coming, take a deep breath and hold—

Hold.

How long would we be holding our breaths if we held our breath for every last life extinguished by this virus?

How long would the world be silent, together, holding on...holding steady...waiting for the end?

THE AMERICAN takes a deep breath. Blackout.

ELIANA
A Monologue
Elisabeth Giffin Speckman

A young mother, ELIANA, in her 20s-30s, stands on the sidewalk beside her home. She drinks from a KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON mug. She seems to watch a child play from a distance.

When I was a kid, we lived next door to a Latvian man. There was this rock that was on the edge of his lawn, right up against ours, sort of balanced between the two driveways. It was a kid's dream, this rock. Big enough to stretch your whole body out on like a mermaid or stand tall on like a lion. All of us neighborhood kids used the rock as home base for tag, as a meeting place, to lay out snacks or Barbies in the sun. After stormy days we'd jump off into puddles to get bigger splashes; on hot days we could find a little shade in the grass beside the basalt or rest our naked bellies against its cool underside. The problem with the rock, though, was that it belonged to Mr. Pavlova. This man took his rock ownership seriously—took everything seriously about his yard, his property. His daughter and I were admonished every single time we touched the rock, for the ways we disobeyed and disappointed him. I couldn't understand how this silly stone could cause such an uproar. This man was an adult. A dad. Why did he care if we played on a rock or his grass or his deck? If we blew dandelion seeds or made rings of mustard garlic and left them strewn along the street? We were six. My mom tried to explain. It mattered because it was his. When he had grown up—where he had grown up—he hadn't had those things. Grass. Seeds. Rocks. He lived in a block apartment, no land to call his own. Property lines became a matter of pride. I still didn't get it. Not until—now. Now I stand outside my door and I yell at the neighbor girl to stay six feet back. I tell my son to stop short of the trees that mark the end of our yard. We wear gloves to get the mail. I see the eyes of all who pass by on walks, assessing the lines of where each property ends, like somehow the virus won't cross this invisible fence. I want my son to grow to love the world. To embrace the rocks, the trees, the sun. It's all I can do not to bite my tongue as I watch him bend to pluck the wild violet from the lawn, hold out a tender arm towards the little girl next door, and turn back with smiling eyes to show me what he's done.

...But Some of Us Are Looking at the Stars
Ania Spyra

In the small hours of the last day of August, nearly half a year into this pandemic, we went kayaking on the White River to watch the moonset. We didn't know if the moon sets because so many times we'd seen its white shadow in the morning sky, but since the word exists so must its referent. We took advantage of my trusty middle insomnia to propel us out of bed at 2:30 am. We drove to the Indianapolis Art Center and put our blue kayaks on the black water. I settled into my kayak without getting my feet wet, and you pushed it off before you got into your own and joined me floating under the Monon Trail Bridge. You then threw me a rope so I didn't have to struggle against the current as you paddled us both upstream.

Two bridges later, just beyond Westfield, we parked our kayaks into a shallow overgrown with grasses. We faced a silhouetted tree-scape, the coin of the moon, a night before Full Corn, hung above it. I photographed the prows of our kayaks in its steel light. As if some realities were too beautiful to believe, landscapes this scenic brings to my mind cinematic backdrops, a hyperrealist painting manufactured by a skilled artisan, printed on a huge canvas and propped from behind by a series of wooden beams.

You talked of jellyfish flashing bioluminescent aqua when as a teen you paddled in the Chesapeake Bay, I of opalescent Puerto Rican squid and emerald glowworms in the caves of New Zealand. A car clunked over the Westfield Bridge, just one to remind us we were not the last people on Earth, or the first. As its noise receded, replaced again by the spacious soundscape of tree frogs and katydids, I felt a vast continent surround us, its immensity a cradle, a caring hand.

With your monocular, we looked at the moon, branches cutting into it like frost. Maybe it's just how time passes with you, at stop-motion speed, but the moon seemed to tumble behind the trees, a snowball. A moon fall, we witnessed, drinking Mango La Croix.

After its silver disc sunk behind the tree line, stars brightened in the sky. I stretched back and realized that the rope that pulled me also pooled water into my perch. I sat in my wet kayak seat, like in some gutter, and searched the firmament—a canvas dome, why else would we call it firm—for Draco, the powerful female serpent dragon, snaking between the two Dippers. My SkyView App did not show the constellation, but Rumi wrote about her, and the ancient Egyptians saw in her a fierce protective Goddess. We talked of the stars our civilizations choose to name, of the Polish cart and the English plow, of Ursa Major and Orion's phallic belt. Then, yawning, we left our holm and spun

around to glide back to the Art Center. We marveled at the houses along the Shore Island Drive turning their back doors to the water, instead of extending their balconies towards its awe. When we landed at the boat ramp, we parted, each compelled by our own bladder into the dark.

That's when I saw them. When I saw one just like them earlier in the month— while burning in my fire-pit some branches the derecho knocked off the hackberries—I first assumed it a reflection in a sequin lost in the lawn or a shard of glass, later a buried firefly, same quality of light. I had lived in Indiana for twelve years and only now did I pay enough attention to notice the bioluminescence in my own backyard. Details stand out if you don't move much.

On the bank of the White River, a whole sea of glowworms shimmered around me, glistening holes of a firefly-lit sieve, as if someone pierced the earth with a pencil, again and again, to expose the unexpected truth that under a thin coat of dirt our planet is a bursting ball of luminous green.

Amazed, I pulled my shorts back on and called out to you to squat beside me. The worms breathed viridescent, synchronized like swimmers, like fireflies when they danced around us earlier in the summer, and like they will again next year.

Dear friend, from my solitude I write to you in yours: no matter how dark, the world also glows. The darker the darkness, the easier to pierce it with the tiniest of de-lights.

Who Was That Masked Man (Or Woman)?

Jim Thompson

They call it a pandemic. I guess that's an epidemic that occurs during an election year. Trump calls it a plague, and people are treating it like the Black Plague. I've been ordered to wear a mask. Do I need one with a long beak like the ones in the old paintings? Masks remind me of the Lone Ranger, but his mask only covered his eyes. Bandits in the Old West used their bandanas as masks, and I guess that's okay for COVID-19 too. I've got some cheap things. I bought a box of them years ago when I had a cold and still wanted to play poker. I don't know why I held on to them, but now they come in handy. Particularly since the price has skyrocketed.

I'm in the hardware store the other day and this guy walks in and says, "Hi Jim." He looks familiar, but I'm not sure who he is in his mask. I smile at him and say, "How's it going?" I know he can't see me smile, and he only hears a muffled version of my voice. Maybe he's mistaken me for someone else named Jim? We both go on about our business satisfied with the informal greeting.

I stop at the local convenience store to pick up some bread. As I'm walking in, a woman walking out waves at me. "How are you holding up?" she says. Her mask is the Wild West bandit kind, and it matches her dress. It's even more effective at hiding her identity. I never forget a good pair of legs, and hers are quite decent, but she's still a mystery to me. "Getting' along," I answer as we pass.

Later that week, I'm filling up at the Shell station. As I'm replacing the gas cap, an SUV pulls up at the other side of the pumps. A masked man steps out whom I think I recognize. Same build, same silver-gray hair as my friend Mark. "Hey Mark, new car?" I ask. He gives me a blank stare and goes about filling his tank, mask and all.

At the drug store, I encounter a man wearing an eye patch. That confirms my suspicion it's Tom. "Hi Tom," I say, but he looks at me with a wary look in his good eye.

"It's me, Jim," I say, and he relaxes visibly.

"Hey Jim. Good to see you. Staying healthy?" He starts to shake my hand, but quickly remembers that's taboo and pulls his hand back.

"No COVID yet," I say as I offer an elbow instead. We bump elbows as we both laugh at what we know looks silly as hell.

As time goes on, the masks get more and more creative. The gal at the fast food window has one featuring bright red lips. At least I can see a smile even if it is only painted on. A clerk at the local Wal-Mart has one with teeth and fangs like Dracula. Of course, some have company logos while others have Bible verses or slogans lettered over where the mouth would be. I marvel that people can make something clever out of anything.

My wife complains people can't see her smile. She's purchased a clear plastic mask to remedy that problem. The look on people's faces when they see her is entertaining, and she often gets compliments on it.

I've been wondering lately, how would you identify a crook? Everyone looks like a criminal escaping the scene of a crime. I expect one of them to stick a gun in my face and demand my wallet.

When we have a vaccine for COVID-19, will we stop wearing masks? Will we be commanded to put them back on for flu season? Will masks just become part of our wardrobe? I think a good idea would be to put our names on our masks, so we'd at least know who we're looking at.

Thoughts on the 2020 Pandemic

Carol Thorne

I could never be a hermit! I value some alone time to think, refresh, gather my thoughts. But this time alone has been too long. When this time of isolation is over, I will be delighted to rejoin my Tai chi classes, Church Choir, and Indianapolis Symphonic Choir. One of the great joys in my life is singing—rarely a solo, but generally with a quartet, my church choir (40-50 people) or Indianapolis Symphonic Choir (100-175 people). It is hard to describe to a non-singer how thrilling it is to be in a group, joined together by the love of music, learning or performing music together. You play off each other's strengths, breathe together, hold notes together, eyes on one conductor who keeps us all together. We perform and rehearse in big spaces but sit almost touching in formation in order to benefit from the close proximity to sing as one voice. You cannot get that feeling if you are all six feet apart. You need to be together to feel the sense of community. Singing during the pandemic is one of the most dangerous activities you can do. ISO has furloughed their musicians and cancelled the rest of the season. Even if it could be rescheduled, how will it look? How do you have a full orchestra and 100 plus singers on stage at Hilbert Circle Theatre and practice social distancing? Let alone social distance in the audience.

People in my age group were born before vaccinations were available for Measles, Mumps, Rubella, and Flu. We did build some natural immunity because we suffered through the illnesses. I had Measles, Rubella, Chickenpox and later Mumps (immediately following HS graduation in 1968.) Many children did not survive those illnesses. I am sure children that contracted Polio did eventually develop antibodies, but only after the virus ravaged their bodies and left them to live in an iron lung, wheelchair, or braces. Several kids in my hometown lived with the lifelong effects of polio. My dad went to work at Eli Lilly in 1952, when I was two years old. Polio was the pandemic for that time. His first research project was on the development and mass production process for producing the Salk Vaccine. It was launched in 1955. So proud of my dad.

I have been doing a lot of baking. It has been a hobby of mine since I was a child in 4H. All of that ten years of cooking, baking and sewing training paid off in the pandemic! My favorite baking activity is baking yeast bread. It has always made me feel self-sufficient, that I would be able to take care of my family if I needed to. The amazing fragrance takes me back to the couple of years that I was a stay at home mom or worked part time. Baking also helped keep the kitchen warm on during cold days. Baking, canning, freezing fruits and vegetables when money was tight. I have earned prizes at the Indiana State Fair for yeast breads, rolls, and cookies. Sewing masks reminds me of my

not as successful 4H sewing projects, still prize-winning, but not like my sister's. Baking is one way I can keep something in control, so rare these days.

Too much snack experience is going on here during the Pandemic! One of my favorite snack experiences did not involve me eating the snack (okay, just a few). I bake cookies and banana bread for my niece. She is a Walgreen's pharmacy manager, and I take the treats to her drive-up window to share with her staff and some to take home to her kids and for her firefighter husband to share with his firehouse. The chocolate chip cookie recipe I use (secret: it is on the Nestle Toll House Semisweet chocolate chip bag) is the same one I have used since I was eight years old. It always brings back memories of childhood. My Mother encouraged me to bake (she didn't do much baking after she taught me how) and share gifts of baked treats with others. Baking banana bread brings back memories of my great-grandma Daisy, who lived to be 96 years old. She had several specialties: spiced apple rings (the really red kind), pickled crabapples, and Banana Bread.

In the beginning I was optimistic that the USA was in a great position to tackle this virus and win. We had so many times before. I was raised by a scientist, spent my entire working career working as a scientist, with brilliant scientists, and married a scientist. Our medical facilities and universities were among the best in the world. We were ready for this. I am horrified to see the way the government/President and his enablers have ignored science and determined all of this is a hoax, even in light of the horrific death toll. It did not have to be this way. Science must win in the end.

Covid Dream Journal

Suzanne Walker

We cancelled our Europe trip yesterday. Ted heard through the grapevine that his work might stop paying people in May. Seems insane.

I have been having crazy vivid dreams. I heard on the radio that this is a Covid thing. Lots of people are having crazy vivid dreams. I had four last night. Count 'em. FOUR.

I had a dream that I visited a lake house with my family, and I walked in and was like, oh, I've been here before (but clearly, I had never been there before). They had a dollhouse that was just like my old dollhouse and a copy of *Little House on the Prairie*. I opened the book and found some writing on the inside of the back cover. It was my writing, from when I had stayed in the lake house before with Dave. Dave! Can you imagine? That must have been how I knew the place. There were people there and we were related. Family, I guess. And Jessica was there, and she and I played with the dollhouse. It was much later when Jessica and I finally realized we needed to leave. We met everyone else outside on a boardwalk and my little sister was like, "You're gonna be in trouble." What the heck does that mean?

Second dream. I was babysitting for a little boy at a fancy house. I guess I went to pick him up. I turned off the alarm to the fancy house. I was supposed to take him to his tap class, but I dropped a shoe in the rocky drive. Then I found a shoe, but it was a doll shoe, not a tap shoe. The little boy was being read to by this old lady and as soon as I picked him up, he showed me that his legs were covered with bruises and temporary tattoos OF HIS FACE. Yeah. Little tattoos of his own smiling face. He pointed to his legs and said to me, "This agony here is not just a blue Band-Aid." I asked him if the old lady had done it and he said yes. Things were muddled for a while and then I remembered hitting the old lady with something and then someone else gave me a three-hole-punch to use instead. I think I woke up then and had to pee.

I went back to bed and the dreams kept coming.

I dreamt that Lisa was having some sort of professional development opportunity for her teacher-friends in her backyard. She hung a sheet from the back of the house and had a projector on a table in the middle of the yard. There were twelve or sixteen La-Z-Boys spaced throughout the yard. Definitely six feet apart. In each chair was a teacher and they were all eating popcorn and watching a presentation. I know it sounds like a movie, but it was not. Lisa yelled at me across the yard, "Hey! Join us for some professional development! It's safe!" No one was wearing a mask. Whatever you say, Lisa.

Last dream of the night. Lilly asked me to play the organ at Mass. I (stupidly) said yes, and two minutes before Mass was supposed to begin, I remembered that I don't know how to play the organ. Lilly was there (but if she was there, why didn't she just play herself?) and she acted like it was not a big deal. She and I pushed our way through a huge crowd to try to find seats in the back. I remember feeling grossed out that so many people were crowded together. We finally found seats and I turned to Lilly and noticed that everyone was wearing a mask. So that was something. A lady came and took my shoes. I tried to get them back. I followed her out of the church. I took them from her, somehow. Then I went back and ended up in the Communion line, but I wasn't doing it right. Fred was there. Of course, Fred was there. He glared at me and pointed to the right line. I didn't really want Communion, but I went up for a blessing. When I got to the front the priest gave me a blessing and then asked me, "Is there anything else I can do to be of assistance to thee?" And I said, "No, thank you." And then he said, "Because you are so perfect?" And he had a sneer on his face. Well, that was so shocking that it woke me up.

I have to tell Jessica that I'm not coming to Sweden.

Indiana Students Speak

A New Experience During a Global Pandemic

Danalee Adams

The light was shining through my thin curtains on a hot June day. It was another day in quarantine. The feeling of nausea had hit me hard today. I had been feeling extremely sick for the last month and a half. The thought that it could possibly be something as drastic as Covid scared me. I didn't have any of the symptoms of Covid so I thought I was in the clear.

I had lain in my bed for most of the day and finally decided to go down to the kitchen to get something to drink. It felt like I was constantly thirsty and no matter how much liquids I drank it would never quench my thirst. My grandma walked into the kitchen while I was chugging a glass of milk.

"Do you feel okay? You look horrible." She said with a concerned look.

"I feel absolutely horrible. I just hope that it isn't anything too bad." I said, while she looked at me and nodded in agreement.

I had been told that taking a shower is a good way to make yourself feel better. I decided to do it and wash my bedding. When I got in the shower, I started to feel light-headed. I had to sit down on the shower floor for a little before getting back up and quickly finishing the shower. As soon as I got dressed, I started to feel like I was going to throw up. I got up quickly and tried to get to the bathroom, but it was too late.

The bathroom floor was cold on my exposed legs and I had vomit everywhere. My head was pounding. My sister heard me and came to the bathroom.

"Are you okay? Do you want me to get grandma?" I shook my head and she headed to the living room to get my grandma.

"What happened?" My grandma asked.

I explained everything and the next thing I know I was back in my room. Food wasn't something I was thinking about, but I knew I should probably get something in me. I made some soup and tried to eat it with no luck. It was only a matter of seconds before it came back up. For the rest of the night I was puking.

I had only gotten a couple hours of sleep before I woke up feeling like I was going to purge again. My head hurt so bad that I couldn't even move my eyes without feeling

pain. My grandma came in for a second then left. I was confused and waited for her to come back.

"I just called the doctor's office. We had an appointment in an hour, get ready." She said while coming up to me and feeling my forehead.

The thought of going to the doctor's office during this major pandemic was scary. There was a guy right inside the entrance of the hospital that took our temperature. My temperature was normal, and I was allowed to go up to my doctor's office. I filled some paperwork out and got called back. It seemed like everyone was little on edge because of the pandemic. I got to my room and the nurse started asking questions as soon as I sat down.

"What symptoms are you having?" She said while getting some notes taken down from my paperwork.

"I'm eating, I'm losing weight fast, i'm really thirsty, I have to go to the bathroom every five seconds, and I have been puking a lot since last night," I said while having trouble breathing, partly from the mask and partly because of how sick I felt.

"Sounds like you might have diabetes. Give me a second and I will take your blood sugar," the nurse said before leaving to get the blood sugar test.

I was partially relieved to know that I didn't have Covid but I was still scared to know what was happening. The nurse came back and took my sugar. Instead of telling me what it said she left and got the doctor. When they came back, they both looked at me with concern.

"The monitor has an error message which means that your blood sugar is higher than it can read." The doctor had explained to me.

The doctor had then turned to me grandma, "You need to take her to Rileys E.R. her sugar is dangerously high."

It felt like everything was happening really fast. We left the hospital and went home for me to get a bag of stuff I would need. Then we went to Riley's E.R. As soon as I got there a nurse put a bracelet on my wrist and took me back to a room. I couldn't breathe and my back felt like it was going to snap in half. I didn't want to take my mask off because of the possibility of getting something like Covid. The E.R. nurse told me to get on the roll away bed so that she could put in I.V.s. I had insulin being pumped into one

and some other liquid being pumped into the other. The nurse then took some of my blood and left. It didn't take her long to come back.

"She is severely dehydrated and her blood sugar is 1044. The normal sugar levels are between 80-120," the nurse said while looking at my grandma.

I was amazed. The nurse also told us that the reason I had been puking so much was because my body was shutting down. The thought that if I had waited a day longer I could have died was insane. I knew that I was sick, but I didn't know the extent of it.

By the end of the night I had been transferred into the intensive care unit. I had to stay there for a couple of days before I was moved into the regular side of the hospital where I stayed for another two day. When I tried to eat it was horrible. Everything tasted gross because of all the medicine that was being pumped into me. There was a lot of learning I had to do.

Everything was so different. I couldn't have any visitors because of Covid. The nurses all seemed to be very careful about touching certain things and washing their hands constantly. If I went anywhere outside of my room, I had to have a mask on. When I finally got out of the hospital reality hit me about how dangerous it actually is to have something medically wrong with you during this pandemic. I knew I had to get even more strict on the precautions I took to stay safe from Covid.

We Will Make It to Eight

Angel Akinleye

My eyes shot open as my hands gripped the bedspread. The small room swallowed me as my breath suffocated me.

I breathed, whispering, “**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,**” thinking of what was and what will be.

I slowly associated myself with the bright posters, vivid Moroccan rugs, and the jungle tapestries in my room, drifting my thoughts to my previous dream. My vision morphed revealing trees that swayed methodically. The ground vibrated, detecting every living pulse from feet away. I was surrounded by people whose rhythm showed the depth of their souls, the bottomless pit of emotion that pulled everyone in like a tide and pulled out leaving everyone to swim ashore alone. Everyone kept dancing in a chaotic, disordered, way. Arms gyrating legs shaking creating an ethereal beauty as the jungle rejoiced.

I slowly got out of bed, grabbed my clothes and make my way to the bathroom. The water slid down my back as time stopped and my mind wandered. Days glided into weeks which flowed into months.

The Earth revolved around the Sun but stopped spinning. The only sound in our ghost town was sirens and protests.

As I stepped out of the shower my wet feet stained the shaggy bathmat. It was too foggy to see myself in the reflection.

The baby blue wallpaper with plush clouds and clear skies was the opposite of the sky outside. A sky filled with CO2 emissions, pollution, and smoke from fires.

I clutched the toothpaste squeezing out hope that tomorrow would be better than today. I breathed and repeated, “**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.**”

I hurried to school, running a couple of steps. My school was the computer. I quickly sat down at a crowded desk. The markers, pens, and crayons in all colors ranging from tangerine- turquoise- and magenta covered it. The computer absorbed the color from the writing utensils to emit blue light which illuminated my face as I logged in. It was time to make a connection over the internet. To nod when someone broke up and to expect the internet to fail, microphones not to work, and video cameras to be turned off.

We all learned at a distance, floating off in space holding on to the rope that was

education...

barely hanging on. The blue light from the computer couldn't brighten the darkness of outer space. I sat for hours on end: **1** hour, **2** hours, **3** hours, **4** hours, **5** hours, **6** hours—

RING RING
RING RING

"Hello," I said warily, standing up to stretch picking up the phone. The cheerful voice made my lips expand into a smile that took up my whole face. I've become closer with my friends although I am not physically with them. The bond we share only gets stronger. My spirit lifts and I become inspired when I talk to them. Everyone needs someone to tell them that everything is going to be okay; to show you the positive side of life. Friends who will walk with you in the dark, holding your hand and finding the light together.

After promises to call tomorrow I pressed "end" to hang up. I sat the phone down on the table. Closing the door to my room, I strolled down the carpeted steps to make my way to the front door. Peering out the window and finding the other pair of my tennis shoes, I dashed outside. The endless houses loomed over me and I walked down the cracked sidewalk. Oak and pine trees blocked the sun as the wind blew. I waved to every runner, dog walker, jogger, and family that rode by on their bikes. It's the simple things in life that I cherish, like when the elderly couple on their daily walk wave back and ask me how my day went. Although I didn't have a clear answer or know exactly how I felt, I replied, "Good." I asked how their day went and they gazed into each other's eyes and simultaneously replied great. Getting a few more blocks, I stopped in my tracks and closed my eyes taking time to be thankful.

I breathed, "**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.**"

I dropped to my bed, drifting to sleep, and imagined myself dancing with an audience watching me. Whispering their thoughts analyzing my movement. I was back in the jungle with people surrounding me. They came closer than 6 feet. Their body heat warmed my heart. We moved as a unit, vanquishing feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, grief, and frustration. We screamed with joy in the dark because we knew the sun would rise...

We say together, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8."

It's okay if you feel like you can't get to **two**

if you're stuck at **four**

or holding on to **seven**

we can and will make it to **eight...**

My Senior Year

Emily Baker

Who would have thought that March 13, 2020, would forever change my life? I mean, the day before was completely normal. I was at school, learning in person. I was hanging out with my friends, making plans for the weekend. We were all hearing a little bit about the Corona- Virus but nothing compared to what would happen to the days following.

The most noticeable thing was that my routine completely changed. My normal of waking up at a certain time to get ready for school was no more. The routine that I had done my entire life was gone. At first, I was happy because that meant a day or several days off of school. At that time, it wasn't a big deal, or so I thought. Then on March 20, we learned that the school closure was extended to May 4th. That's when things really started to sink in. At that moment, I realized that school was not the same. I would have never thought that it would be the way it is today. My first prom that I had been looking forward to going to for so long was not going to happen. The night of getting all dressed up, looking pretty, and taking pictures with my friends was gone. The night I was supposed to spend with my boyfriend and friends was gone forever, and to me this wasn't fair. Not fair to me, not fair to my boyfriend, who was a senior, and not fair to my friends. Something as simple as me going science class first period, to going to math class second class period was not a part of my routine anymore and I really missed it. I missed everything that I hated doing the month before. I hated Math class because I struggled with Math for so long, but I suddenly found myself missing Math class. I missed being in class and actually being able to ask a question instead of having to send an email and wait for a response and try to figure it out on my own. Sometimes virtual learning is hard. School is more than just the academics to me. It is also about the social interactions with my friends, teachers, and other students. School life as I had known for the last eleven years was never going to be the same. I think of myself as being a pretty active and social person. Now in an instant I was confined to my house. The summer before my senior year of high school was going to be the worst one yet and there was nothing I could do about it. There was no more meeting friends for dinner, going to parties or staying all night at other people's houses. Wearing a mask is like second nature to me now.

Not only was my life changed but also my extracurricular activity of cheer. The sport that I love most. The sport that I had invested so much time in. I missed cheer. I missed being with my friends, I missed cheering at games, and most of all I missed being with my cheer family. These girls and coaches are a special part of my life and not seeing them three to four times a week really hurt me. The two or three times a week practices

were over. That exciting feeling of cheering in front of my classmates with my cheer family at the basketball games is something that I really loved and just like that it was over.

Now, since all of this began, I have started my senior year of high school which should be the best one yet. It's not. Nothing is the same. That routine that I had for so long is still not there. There's nothing normal about the new normal that we all have to live in. There is no more getting to school early just to meet your friends. There's no more sitting wherever you want in lunch, there's no more hugging your friends in school or even sitting close to share secrets. In fact, school doesn't even seem normal because you are only required to go two days a week if you want. School work doesn't even feel the same. Learning in front of a computer just doesn't feel normal, like when you are in class, but this is how it has to be. I can only pray that my grades won't suffer.

The homecoming dance is already cancelled. Football games have already been cancelled. I fear that prom will be cancelled and most of all I fear that my graduation will not happen, and I have worked so hard to get to this. To some this won't matter, but to me this is a big deal.

But even though the coronavirus will rob me of my senior year, it has brought some good things. Since the beginning of this I have been able to spend more time with my mom. We have spent a lot of time outdoors. We built bonfires almost nightly. We both tried out fishing because that was something we could do and still practice social distancing. I would never have thought that I would love doing that and I am pretty good at it. I remember when I caught my first fish. That was just the beginning of a new love that I had found from being in such an uncertain world. Fishing became more than just fishing to me. It was about the quality time spent with my mom and the few select friends that I could be with away from all the distractions. Being outdoors brings a calming effect over me. Fishing is so relaxing in this crazy world that we live in. The coronavirus has made me realize to not take things for granted and to be thankful for the small things in life... things that I have taken for granted before now.

Untitled

Noelia Chavez

It was the 2nd week of March. I was looking forward to spring break and my 17th birthday. All of a sudden, we hear about a virus on social media that broke out in China. We talked about it in school and never would've thought it would affect us, we didn't think much of it. The days went by and we heard an announcement at school that we have to go home a week earlier than when spring break started. Normally we only have one week of our spring break, but nobody was complaining about getting an extra week off until the teachers told us we are going to have to start doing our schoolwork on our Chromebooks. Now everyone was complaining.

"Well it's only for a week," I said. "It says in our Gmail we will return on April 6th," Or so I thought. That week of E-learning went by and it wasn't too bad, just a bit different. "Finally! It's the week of my birthday," I said.

I started planning what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. Without warning, I saw that everything said, "Permanently Closed". I asked my mom why everything was like that. She told me this virus has gotten here all the way from China. We turned on the news and they said we were in a pandemic

"STAY 6 FEET APART, WEAR MASKS, WEAR PROTECTIVE GLOVES, DON'T LEAVE YOUR HOUSE IF IT ISN'T ESSENTIAL," the news reporter said. Well just great. I'm bummed out because of course, this had to happen days before my birthday. My mom later revealed to me a surprise she had for me.

"Noelia," my mom said, "This was going to be a surprise, but with all of this going on I see that now I have to cancel it,"

"What was it?" I say, filled with sadness

"So, we were going to go to Florida,"

I know I may sound dramatic, but I was holding back some tears because that would've been so exciting since I've never been at the beach there. I started to think further, *what more is going to be ruined because of this virus?*

"Well, at least we're still going back to school, because that's very essential, right?" And of course! We get an email from our teachers saying that we won't be returning to school anytime soon. I wish I would've known that. That day would've been my last day at school. I still had hope for us going back to school, until May came around.

“PROM!?” I say to myself.

Since the first day of junior year I was looking forward to my first prom. It's every girl's dream to try on beautiful dresses, pick the perfect color, and of course with the perfect date. The days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months. Birthdays in my family were going by and just a small celebration was all we did. I felt mostly bad for my little siblings. They're smaller and can't understand everything. Graduations, weddings, they had to be limited; pictures had to be taken with our masks on. This was a nightmare that never ended. Our family used to go out every weekend, whether that was the park, out to eat, or a friend's house just to chill. Now, all we do is lie around the house slowly turning into sloths. To this day nobody knows how the rest of the year is going to turn out but so far 2020 has gone downhill. Although the Coronavirus has affected me in some way, if we all try to stay distant and safe the best we can, it will most definitely die down. I'm starting my senior year, my last year of high school. That means college tours, senior night, prom, graduation, and senior pictures. It will be super dreadful if we seniors don't get to experience all of that with this going on. All we have to do is follow the safety rules, sit back and wait and, hopefully, 2020 or 2021 will be the year that Coronavirus ends.

Sheltered in Music

Jada Cooper

I never thought that the world would be in a global pandemic. I never thought that one mistake could kill twenty-one million people. I never thought that people would lose their jobs and houses. I never thought that students would be affected by this virus and have to miss school and sports. I never thought graduation parties would be canceled and seniors would have to celebrate the beginning of their adult lives confined to a house. People have been affected by this virus and lost a lot of things we thought didn't matter until we didn't have them anymore. I can say one thing for sure; a lot of people have changed because of this global pandemic.

People all over the world are quarantined in different places and confined to that single small space. They might be confined to their house, the hospital, a containment center. No one would have thought that these months would be spent away from things they thought they never needed. Everything has changed. Some people are surrounded by family while others are alone. I'm surrounded by my family, my brother and dad. I was asked to describe the place I would choose to be quarantined but there's no right answer. It could be a place I love and cherish or a place with the people I love the most. It could also be both. It could also be a place where there is just peace and silence.

If I had to choose a place to be quarantined to a specific place, it would be the Royal Conservatory of Music in Ontario, Toronto. This place would be filled with only my brother and father. This place is filled with architecture and breathes music. The windows in the entire place lead to breathtaking views of trees and the sights at night with the lights on are amazing. In this place I would be able to fully play my music, the notes bouncing off the walls and echoing throughout the many rooms.

Every place has a specific smell of something and if it was your house, it would smell of you or the cleaning supplies you just used to clean. But in this conservatory, all you can smell is resin and the dust clinging to the rafters. There would be a faint smell of hard work from the people that used to be there. This conservatory used to hold thousands of people in it but now it would only hold three people living inside its walls. The two people I love the most and me. At night, you would feel like you can hear notes bouncing off the walls as if someone were playing an instrument, but no one would play. It would be like an ongoing echo that just lasted forever. I choose this place because it resonates with me. Its unique architecture matches my personality. The colors of the place hold depth and feelings and that just matches me somehow. The rooms with barely any people. I love my space and just the silence you could feel from it.

A New Lifestyle

Anna Copeland

When this virus started, I wasn't too worried about it. My friends and I would joke around about it before it came to the United States. I started to wonder if it was going to come here; at this point I didn't really know the full extent of it. I didn't know that so many people were dying, or that it was shutting countries down completely. When I first heard that there was a case in Alaska I was starting to get really concerned. My cousin lived up there with her husband and baby, so I was very concerned about their health. Then it started to spread fast around the United States. I was starting to get very concerned about my loved ones' health. My mom has asthma, so she is at high risk for it, my uncle has diabetes and heart problems, my aunt has cancer. My cousin Jennifer works as a nurse in Terre Haute and she has seen the worst of it.

For me, losing people I love is one of my worst fears. When I was fifteen, in my freshman year of high school, I came home from school one day and I found my dad in his bed; he had died in his sleep. I won't go into much detail on that, but it is why it is so hard for me to lose people I love. So, when the virus started to spread, I got really freaked out.

So, I'm in my junior year of high school and this pandemic hits. No one knows what to do because something like this has never happened. So, they shut down all the schools and go completely online, which is a big adjustment for everyone. Even for the teachers, because no one has ever experienced a pandemic this bad or widespread. I went from being in school, hanging out with friends, and going to color guard in the evening to no school, no hanging out with friends, and not being able to finish my junior year of winter color guard. Everything just came at once. Soon they were canceling everything.

This year was especially hard for the seniors. They didn't get to have their senior prom or even really get to graduate by walking across the stage in the field house how we've always done it. That's what every high schooler looks forward to. That's the finale, it's showing the people, I did it, I graduated high school. And they didn't get that. Some got a parade but had to stay in their cars, like Franklin community. Or for Fishers they did one student at a time. They let one family in at a time, called the name, and they walked, got their diploma. Then the family left and so did the student.

And I know in the grand scheme of things it's not that big of a deal because people are dying, and I am very empathetic for them. I'm not saying that graduation is more important than the people dying right now. But that was a big thing for my family. And we were upset because two of my cousins graduated this year and no one but their

immediate family could come. For my family, we have a graduation every year for the next eight years. I hope this ends before any of the rest of them happen and that my family is lucky enough to not have anyone we know have Covid. And I hope that stays the case. Especially for my aunt and uncle in Terre Haute. They already have a lot of health problems. And they are the closest thing I have to my dad. My uncle is the spitting image of my dad, and he acts so much like him. If I lost him, I don't know what I would do. For them, they were hit pretty hard but in a good way. My uncle owns a farm and a lot of people want his help with things fixing things at their house. And no matter what it is, he somehow figures out a way to help. In return, the people paid him or traded something with him—like he needs more junk.

In ways, this pandemic has been very awful. But in other ways it has helped people out. But all together it's been scary, heartbreaking, boring, all around sucked. But we have to keep pushing. That means you need to wear your mask. I wear one for your safety and mine. So please do the same. It will make this thing go away quicker. I understand you have rights, but when those rights are hurting others, don't you think you should stop evaluate the situation and fix the problem?

Shut In

Nyeshia Dentis

I stay in a house where the neighborhood is quiet, yet fireworks are confused with gunshots. The neighborhood isn't bad, don't get me wrong. It's just the sounds are sometimes scary. Four medium-to-small bedrooms that have their own good and bad aesthetics. My grandma's room is clean, yet takes charge; my sister and brothers' room is playful, but doesn't listen; my mom's is a beautiful fairy tale, but too small to fit some happiness in; and my room is filled with laughter, but has doubt, anxiety, and fear. When you're home, you can do anything your imagination lets you but it's kind of limited. It's your time to explore things you like about yourself and change the things you don't.

The smells are dreamy and flavorful yet bitter. Our family has days when it's full of cheer, days where you think "Am I really here right now?" because you can't believe how much love you get from one another no matter the faults, and days you want to break everything in your house but you then would regret it because those decorations were more than just "decorations". Every day is different. It could smell like cleaning supplies one day, to yelling at someone about why that one rusty spoon in the sink isn't cleaned, to laughter about what our uncle did to embarrass himself the other day, to not getting your point across because your emotions get in the way of explaining your very valid point. The joy yet heartache a family could bring to you in a day is crazy but sometimes worth it. Some people don't have this or have too much of it. I get it. The sign is just telling me balance is good but if too much is off, then you'll feel off, and sometimes everything will be off. Everything around you.

I have been dreading coming to school ever since 5th grade and I did try to let the environment during every school year change my mind, but it hasn't done me any good yet. With it being my last year it kind of sucks that nothing really changed with the people, teachers, and school work and with coming into this school 7th grade. I thought it would change but it hasn't. From the students calling other students names to teachers thinking we are going to actually use this knowledge after high school, and work being handed for us to do but not to think.

I've been at my best since quarantine though. My anxiety has been leveled and I honestly feel really happy. When and if we go back, that high will for sure come down because I'll be in a place where I feel I can't thrive and be myself at. But overall, this experience was great and gave me time to figure things out with myself and my near career. Self-care was something I could never get at because of school, work, after school activities, getting picked up late and so forth. Ever since Covid-19,

I've got time to focus on myself intensely.

So, overall, I've been great since the shut down and it's probably selfish for me wanting it to last longer just so that I can be leveled and feel great. I've had many great opportunities since the shut down and it feels good to finally get recognized. I just hope I still can with the rest of the things I proceed to pursue in this life.

Intwisted Perspective

Jaquelin Escobedo

It has started. I am currently in my room, I think. It has been so long I don't even know the days anymore. I started my day by going into my room. My room is just like any other teenage room. It has a huge bed, a nightstand right next to it with a desk at the bottom of the bed. Right next to the desk is my closet then a huge gap which always bothers me and then my bedroom door. I lay and sit on my pink comforter as I do my schoolwork. Then, after, I go to volleyball practice. The next day I repeat. The day after that, I repeated. Repeat, repeat, repeat REPEAT! It is like a symphony playing that same sequence over and over again. People start coming out in their masks with the same routine. They say we will get close again, we will have fun again, and it will all go back to normal—CUT! Just like if we were in a movie. All of those people around me started to fade away and suddenly I was transported back in my room.

"We need more time, LONGER, stay inside, six feet apart, MASKS!" they said. All of these phrases just started to mix and fade and they left me all alone. Once again, I was back where I started. I lie in my bed, and I sit as I do my schoolwork. Then, after, I go to volleyball practice. The next day I repeated. The day after that I repeated. Repeat, Repeat, WAIT! I was so used to this routine I didn't even smell the chlorine, roses and the fresh cut grass in the summer windy breeze. When did it become summer? The sunlight started to creep underneath my bedroom door. Then it started to appear through my window. It was starting to light up my entire room starting from my closet door to the edge of my nightstand. That is when it touched me. For a brief moment I felt the warmth. I felt joy. But in doing so, I infected it.

"I INFECTED THE SUN!" I shouted. Everyone started to come near like a tornado. They all surrounded me to check if I was okay. One of them started to say, "We are here for you." Some followed. Another one said "We will get through this together." Some followed. They said I was crazy. But they were not listening to me. "I INFECT

Right before I could finish, they turned black and started to blend in with the walls. Every single thing in my room went with them until it was just me on the floor. All you could hear was my breathing. I wanted it to stop. I wanted all of this to stop so I screamed hoping for someone to hear me. "STOP, STOP, STOP, PLEASE STOP, STOP." I must have screamed this a thousand times because I couldn't hear myself anymore. My vision turned everything white. I was panicking, and I couldn't hear myself breathe anymore. That is when I heard a loud bang and I could feel someone touching me. It all started to focus again. I asked my sister what had happened, and she said, "I heard you

screaming “Stop,” so I came in to see what happened and you were frozen on the bed, staring at the wall with the computer right in front of you. You have been in that position since I woke up and left this morning.” I told her I was probably sleeping, even though my eyes were open because that would be the most sane response to what she just witnessed.

Right as she was walking out the door I asked her, “What day of quarantine is it?”

My sister shouted, “Day 1”

I collapsed.

If I Could Choose

Jason Gascoyne

If I could choose where I could be quarantined, where would it be? At first this was a tough question for me to answer. I can choose anywhere in the world! Where would I decide to go? Would I go to a big city like San Francisco, or a rural country road where I could be by myself and enjoy the nature around? I could go to a different country and see how it is there. Would I want to go to London or Tokyo? Maybe I could go to Toronto, so I am still close to home.

Even with the mass array of options, I think that I would choose to stay where I have been for quarantine. I would choose this for a multitude of reasons. I am familiar with the place. I do not want to have to try and learn a new place and culture in the middle of a pandemic. I know all the places I like in my area. I know the best place to go to for comfort food, I know the best place to go to be calm, and most of all I know the community. If I were in a new community or by myself for quarantine, I would not have stronger bonds with my community.

During the quarantine members of my community have come together to help each other, lending each other items that the other needs because we know it is tough times for everyone. During quarantine I was able to see my friends still (socially distanced) because we are near each other. I would not be able to do that if I was even a state over or in the country. Much less if I was halfway across the world.

If I was in a different place for quarantine, I would have to try and make friends with people I have never met. This would be a problem currently. It would be hard to make friends with someone during a quarantine since we couldn't actually see each other or actively know each other.

During quarantine me and my family got to know each other better. At first it was strange that we all had to actually spend time with each other. We didn't normally spend time with each other with our busy lives. But with quarantine we did not have an excuse to not spend time with each other. We were no longer spending all our time at school, work, sports, extracurricular activities, etc. We actually found time to spend time with each other. We reignited several family routines that no one had followed since I was younger. We started to have a family movie night again. We would go to the park and play with the dogs. During quarantine we got closer to each other as a family. If I could choose where I could stay for quarantine, I would not change a thing.

Where I'd Like to Shelter

Jonathan Hammack

I would want to be on a secluded island with just me and my family. This island has beautiful trees and flowers. I would wake up every morning to the sound of bird singing and the smell of my mom's delicious breakfast. On this Island I take walks around it with my brother and sister, for the goal of feeling the wind brush through our hair. I walk out to the beach every Saturday evening and walk along it to feel the sand between my toes. How warm this sand is. I am now sprinting towards the water. I slow just as I reach the water, I hear someone say something. I turn around and see my sister standing there signaling for me to come back into the cabin. She grins and turns to walk inside. I get into the cabin to the wonderful smells of dinner and what is that smell? I take a big smell of the air and say quietly, "Cookies." I walk into the kitchen to be greeted by my mom, brother, and sister sitting at the table waiting for me. After we eat, we all go to the porch and watch the sunset to end another great week.

Covid Experiences

Koyan Dra Hawkins

My Covid experience is the worst. I have been through a lot of hardships and many depressions. Well, for start many friends, siblings, my mother, and all of my family have been through a hard time. I feel like I'm in a coma and I can't wake up from it. It's only getting harder by the day looking outside as the day grows colder. You get depressed not being able to see your friends. It's hard. Believe me when I say I've tried to relax but it's difficult, like trying to open your heart to someone who's broken it, it's not gonna happen. My life in this coma has not been all that bad. I've gotten to meet people I don't even know, and I even have been able to get a job. So, it's not all that bad I've been able to binge watch all my favorite shows and be playing as much music as I want.

Spending time with my parents is the best thing ever. I have gotten to do things with them before that I haven't in a lifetime. The first time we all heard of this we didn't think anything of it. Then as it started to get serious, we got serious as well. I mean getting toilet paper from every shelf, anything really, but even with all of that my parents weren't even panicking. I'm like, are you ok?

So, here's my overall message. If this crisis ever ends, I want all of you to know that you absolutely need to keep your friends and your family even closer because the smallest things can make a big difference.

I would like to tell you a story about my life before this Covid. My life was amazing. I had friends, I had a life, and I needed those close to me the most because I get depressed very easily and I always get out of it. My life was perfect, but I guess every good thing came to an end. I will never forget what this Covid did to me. I will never forgive how my life became a wreck with Covid.

I also got to spend time with my aunt and spend the weekend and a few weeks later my cousin spent the night for a basketball game that she won. I went to my grandmother's house for a funeral, but we didn't go because of Covid We spent time with my grandma for the time being and it was lovely for the most part until we had to leave that evening.

My other experience was with my aunt. It was amazing at first; we got ice cream and went to the store together and she even gave me some money. But then it took a dark turn.

My last experience is my music. My life has been a doozy over these past few months and I have been listening to genres I've never listened to before, like Jennifer Lopez etc.

My favorite music comes from video games, though that make me both happy and sad—like, to name a few, Fire Emblem, SSX Tricky and Pokemon. But my favorite is definitely jazz. I hope I don't sound too corny.

My mother and I are two peas in a pod. We stick by each other's side no matter what. I wouldn't ask for another parent. She's so loyal, magnificent and so independent. We make such a great team. I wish she wasn't much older than me because she looks just like me. What I admire the most about her is her ability to stay calm in the most dangerous situations. She can be so calm about anything. I will never leave her side no matter what happens in life. I will protect her with life and never falter.

My experience with online learning was so difficult at first with zoom calls and other things but we eventually got it together with everything. But so many things were confusing, like teachers not posting any assignments or not even doing the zoom calls. But if I'm to be honest, I would love to go back to school and not have to leave it because I'm a senior and I would've thought to at least have my last year of school with my friends. But this cCovid has ruined everything and I mean everything for everybody.

What I want to say last is, don't let this Covid bring you down. Enjoy life as much as you can because you never know when it'll get taken away from you completely. Keep your friends close and keep your family even closer.

Home

Maritza Hernandez

Home, the place where I stayed isolated from the world to be safe. Trying to be safe when I left or just wanted to hang with friends but remembering that I have to stay home, bored, and alone with just my thoughts. Attempting to run away from a virus that can harm me and people I come into contact with. These times make you aware that life is short and not take anything for granted. Outside looks empty, no movement, no kids laughing, nothing—like the world disappeared.

Nothing to do but just watch T.V., play with siblings, have the same schedule for five straight months, not being able to see friends for half a year. Wondering if after all this life will ever be back to normal or whether we'll have a new normal life. You wonder what could have done to stop this from happening and what people could have done before it was a deadly virus. Why did it take us so long to realize this is not the flu? We all question, but we are still in the situation. Eight months later, we can go out more but what can others and I do to save ourselves when others don't care or believe in this virus?

How Corona Affected Me

Alyssa Hill

When you think back on this year, what do you immediately think about? I think about how Corona happened so fast I never even had time to think about how it was affecting me. I learned to work 6+ hours a day with a mask on, I learned to manage online school, and I got to see how Corona affected my close friends. We never really pay attention to the small details in the moment, but once we look back on them, we can see how significant they are.

I work at Noodles N' Company. I have worked there for a little over a year. Just like all of the other food businesses, we all had to adapt rather quickly to wearing masks. Because I am two months away from being the big eighteen, I have been able to pick up doubles at work a few times a week. That means nine-hour shifts. I have had to become comfortable wearing my mask for multiple hours without a break. My coworkers and I never thought about how long we would have to wear these masks during our shifts. I adjusted to this new way of protection still knowing there were others who weren't. I followed the rules because I am just another person working in the food industry. Although Corona spiced my wardrobe up a bit, I still normalized by going to my job almost every day.

I never would have thought I would end my junior year and start my senior year as an online student. I'm sure none of us did. Corona made parents and children make education decisions with little time. Many parents, including mine, decided online school would be best to ensure our greatest chances of good health. Although, as a student, I struggled to keep up with the assignments, the teachers also struggled to learn new teaching methods with little time and practice. While on different ends of the educational spectrum, we both had to learn to adapt to something new quickly. Online school was a struggle in the beginning, but we have come a long way. I can say I am comfortable with this new way of learning through technology fully.

During the Corona, my friends had different experiences compared to me. I think this is important because I value their experiences. I can step back and see what they were going through at that time and place. That way, whether I'm giving advice or not, I can understand their level of thinking. The saying, "You just need to put yourself in someone else's shoes and then see how they feel and then you will understand why they are reacting or why they are behaving the way that they are behaving," was stated by Navid Negahban. This quote is significant to me because I was raised to believe that the only way you can help somebody is if you experience what they went through. Put yourself in

that time and place and just try and really process what they were emotionally, physically, and spiritually feeling in that moment.

One of my friends (Danalee), for example, was quarantined for months. She barely left her house, unless it was a quick trip down the road to the neighborhood Walmart. She experienced being cooped up physically and emotionally. She didn't get to see the hang of her friends and even close relatives. Corona, for Danalee, really switched up her daily routine in her life. To continue on the comparison, my other friend (Diego), chose to go back to in-class learning. He and his parents decided that going back to school was a better option for him. So not only has he had to adapt to wearing a mask to work, he also has to wear it during school. I'm sure being back in the classroom has its perks though. Math, for example, has been crazy hard to learn over online school.

When looking back on my past year, I think of learning to work 6+ hours a day with a mask on, learning to manage online school, and getting to see how Corona affected my close friends. I am excited to see what the upcoming years hold after having this new experience with a global pandemic. COVID-19, scientifically, politically, emotionally, socially, and in every other aspect of life took us all for a challenge. We will eventually look back at this year and see everything we didn't realize in the first round.

Staying In

Tony Huett

I have been staying inside during quarantine. Although this is not very different from the norm, it is a change of pace. Things go by slower and seem to not affect as much. In my house there is me, my dad, and our roommate Alex; we call him Shew. My dad and I live on the bottom floor while Shew gets upstairs to himself. My room is small, but it is about tall feet tall, which is strange for a room the size it is. My room has two doors, one door to the living room and one door to the bathroom hallway. My dad's room is slightly bigger, being not as tall but having more floor space. He also has a closet (which I do not) and his closet is about as long as his room. Shew by far has the biggest room. though, being that upstairs is his whole room. He has a bathroom, two closets, and his actual room which is bigger than both me and my dad's. Our backyard is fairly sizable, I don't know exact dimensions, but it's big.

Staying here for a constant six months was diminishing. I had no social contact, and for anyone that knows me knows that I thrive in social situations and it's where I'm happiest. So, me being away from that for six months straight really got to me. I would get angry easier, sad easier, basically every emotion easier; this even reflected in my grades towards the end of quarter four. I would make jokes, but there was no one to hear them; I had games, but no one to play with. It was just overall lonely. And I was just overall sad. Eventually, my hygiene started to suffer, and I started gaining weight. I lost the motivation to do anything beyond what I had to do. I started sleeping all day, even through some school days.

The summer was even worse than e-learning. I had absolutely no physical contact with anyone. It was torture. I would wake up, eat, drink, sleep; wash, rinse, repeat. My summer was a long, mundane cycle that seemed like it would never end. It was Hell, just short of the fire (that was across the street; there was a house fire across the street). It was just me, my thoughts, and this hundred-year-old house. The house got infested with mice over the summer, so on top of being bored constantly, there's an invasive species living in there.

Watching for My Flower to Bloom

Autumn Kelly

I remember sitting in a restaurant with my two close friends when the news about school closing had been announced. Since then months have gone by and I have been isolated from everyone outside of my house as the number of cases has risen. Home has always been a place I've looked forward to, yet somehow COVID-19 seemed to change that. A few minutes outside my house seemed to never be enough, nor a trip to the store. My safe place had become a prison cell for my mind with endless days sitting in a dark room alone. Was I ever truly alone though? My family was always around, and my friends were a text away, yet for some reason I still felt like my world was crumbling around me and closing in while I could do nothing but observe in silence. Inside of my home, all I could do is hope the world I had once known will be restored to come back again as if it were a dying flower blooming back.

"My mom just texted me and told me that school will be closed for two weeks due to the coronavirus!" my friend Megan had exclaimed as if she were excited about the stay home. Of course at the time I was excited too, so I immediately called my mom to see if she had heard the news.

"Hey mom! Did you hear that we don't have school for the next two weeks because of the virus? I don't even think it is all that bad right now." I asked my mom over the phone while I was still in the restaurant with my friends.

"You guys still have school Friday though, The school has emailed me about it" my mom had told me. I already felt upset about going. It wasn't fair that every other school was out on that Friday, but now I realize that I am so thankful for that extra day to see my friends and teachers. The first week inside was great, I was doing fine in school and keeping up with my work. The second week I started to stop working on school; I always said I'll do my work tomorrow. Eventually we were told that school would no longer be back in session for the remainder of the year, I was flooded with so many emotions. My energy and motivation was gone, I had already felt lifeless and empty. I know I am not the only one who feels this way. I missed my friends and teachers, I was sick of doing school online. I had stopped doing work all together for a couple of weeks, and the teachers had messaged me and asked how I was doing. I wanted to be honest, but I didn't want them worrying about me too much. How could I even explain how I felt? There must be those out there that feel much worse than I had, they are the ones that need the support this time.

At the end of May, school was wrapping up. I was so far behind I couldn't catch up with all my work. I felt horrible about it, I had failed three classes. I have never failed anything before, so I took it hard. I had stopped messaging my friends, I stopped trying to be social, and my self-esteem became lower than it had ever been. I spent nights crying for seemingly nothing. I wanted home to feel like home again and not like the prison it felt. I want to go outside and see my friends. I want the world to be watered and become a beautiful blossom again.

All the times I had gone out with my friends to the mall, a restaurant, or even just their houses are the greatest memories in my life. I had never realized how such I had taken the opportunity to go out and socialize for granted. My friends tried to make plans, but every time their parents would say no. All the words just began to sound like a broken record, it was always "it isn't safe" or "you can't go there." We wanted to go roller skating, bowling, shopping, etc. It would have been so nice to just go out normally with them again, but I stead we had to pick places we could distance ourselves when we did hang out. We managed to hang out twice throughout this long period of time and each time was amazing. I felt so happy and free while having the wind blow through my hair while driving around with my friends. The sun setting as the air cools down, it has sent goosebumps all over my body. This was a feeling I had missed so much; I felt like I was free to do whatever I wanted. Those few hours of driving out of town felt amazing and I wish it could have lasted longer, but soon I was standing outside the door of my COVID-19 prison. I looked back at my friend and gave them a wave and a smile, I was so thankful for the amazing few hours that we had spent together. It is August now; school has begun again online. I want to do better; I want to feel better about myself and school. I am trying my best, but I am still sitting here waiting and watching for my flower to bloom while my broken record plays in the background.

What I Took for Granted: Losing My Great-Grandfather

Kiera Noe

The hardest loss I have had because of the coronavirus is my great grandpa. On August 12, 2020 he died due to COVID. When I think of my grandpa I think of smoking and cigarettes. He never smoked but there was always smoke around him. What I'm going to miss most about him is his sense of humor. He always said the dumbest stuff, but it was hilarious. My life is going to be different because he's gone. He was always there on holidays. I think about my grandpa I think of Thanksgiving and Christmas. I taste deviled eggs and turkey. I have a ton of memories about my grandpa but the one that sticks out is when we were all at my grandma's house (his daughter). We were all gathered around her table; some of us were sitting in chairs because there weren't enough chairs for everyone. That was the last time I remember eating as a family at a table.

Our reactions were very original. We cried and we were sad. My mom was the most affected because it was her grandpa too and she grew up with him longer than we did. No one in my family knew how I felt until the funeral. It was an open casket and it was really hard watching him there, knowing I was never going to see him again. I'm never going to see him at Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter again. I have tons of regret about him dying. I regret not talking to him more. I regret not getting to know him like I should've.

My grandpa was in the hospital for days before he died, and we knew it was coming. We just didn't want it to. This taught me a lesson. It taught me to not take life for granted. I will never regret not doing something if I do what I want to. My grandpa was kind, loving and funny and I'm going to miss him.

Overcoming Family Crisis in the Midst of a Pandemic

Esther Sui

The cloud was gloomy, thunder roaring and the sky weeping. It was just another rainy night. As I opened my drowsy eyes, I glanced at the dark coffee colored clock ticking the time away. It was 8:20 p.m. I woke up and the sound of silence greeted me. I then rubbed my eyes and slowly raised my body up. Then, my soft hands touched the red and velvety curtain. My soft hands glided over the thick velvety fabric, I then gazed at the misty window, which was covered by the droplets of rain. As my pupils were examining the gloomy clouds and windy trees. A sudden knock brought me back to reality. A calming childlike voice told me to come out and eat.

As I slowly closed the velvety curtains, I turned my attention toward my fresh and clean white wooden bedroom door. I simply replied with a hoarse voice and said “Yes, little sis, I will be out soon.” After a few minutes of sitting on the bed, a sudden noise erupted from my hungry stomach. That was a sign that my stomach is yearning for delicious food. Indeed, I was starving. Gently, I removed my fluffy and soft maroon colored blanket from my body. Later, I climbed out of the bed, my foot landed on a warm and fluffy beige colored carpet. I grabbed the maroon blanket and folded it and placed it upon the bed.

Steadily, I moved towards my slippers, which was placed on the beige carpet. Then, I slid both my feet on the comforting and warm cherry red slippers. Slowly, I took a couple steps forward and placed my left hand on the reflective bronze colored doorknob. I grasped and gently twisted the doorknob and pushed the wooden door open. Beams of bright lights greeted my presence. I then walked a couple of steps forward and arrived at the kitchen. Then, I sat down on the brown hazelnut colored soft chair. I glanced to the right and saw my little sister chowing down on some chow mein. My sister can be a bit optimistic, but at times she is pretty clever and outgoing.

As I slowly turned my gaze toward the large, flat and polished TV a sudden emotion of sorrow filled my mind. It was not because of my hunger or my loneliness. But, the news of the pandemic, because of which many souls have suffered consequences and have lost their loved ones. Out of nowhere, a teardrop fell from my right eye, which I immediately wiped it off with a Kleenex. A loud masculine voice echoed throughout the house; it was my father. The sound of heavy footsteps could be heard.

Later, a figure greeted my sister and me. It was our dearest father; he greeted us with a warm and fatherly smile. I noticed that something was wrong, it seemed as if behind his smile there was a bitter sadness. Before, I could question my curiosity to my dad, he

informed us to change our clothes. Without hesitation, my little sister dashed out of the kitchen and I followed her. We both shuffled past the dim and dark bathroom, and after taking a couple of strides forward. Both of us proceeded to change into matching comfy clothes with a pair of black plain socks.

After that, I walked over to the deep chocolate brown colored vanity table. There, I slowly raised my right hand to grab a hold of the dark comb. I thoroughly combed through my dark midnight black hair. A sudden mild and loud voice of the door shutting could be heard from my bedroom. To my surprise, I just remembered that my mom, dad, and sister were waiting for me in the car. I quickly dashed out of my bedroom and scanned through my shoes. Quickly, both my hands started moving towards the fresh and new black checkered slip on vans. I slipped on the checkered vans and locked and closed the brown wooden front door.

While walking towards the car, a cold breeze of air blew my midnight black hair. I grasped onto the midnight blue car handle, I pulled it open and then closed it followed by a loud thud sound. As a cautious person, my hands reached for the seatbelt and I buckled my seatbelt on. A feminine and honey-like voice filled the car, it was my beloved mother. My mother told us that grandpa was reported to the emergency room but is now safe, and that we will be visiting him. A wave of excitement and happiness rushed through me, yet my heart was dejected.

Nevertheless, I was excited and was looking forward to visiting Grandpa. The smell of French vanilla latte filled the air. To my left, was my sister laughing her heart out while watching memes on her iPad. In the front, as usual, my parents seemed to be having a parents' talk. Gradually, the sound of the GPS and my parents' voices started to fade away, and I fell into a deep slumber and sleep consumed me. Ray of bright light embraced my eyes; there a figure stood in front of me. Lips as pale as a snow, light honey-brown eyes inspecting me and a faint honey, sweet like laughter, filled my mind.

Tears started rupturing out of my eyes. A gentle body embraced me, I caught a glimpse of a wrinkled face with a welcoming smile. I gasped and more tears started emerging from my face. The person I had been yearning for spoke to me "My child, don't be dejected that you couldn't fulfill your promise and visit me. Sometimes, we never know when we will breathe our last breath. Love everyone and take care of your beloved Grandpa before it's too late." said my dearest grandmother. How I had been yearning to hear her voice for years.

Suddenly, a loud honk woke me up. I opened my eyes as my heart rate started speeding up. "Oh great, you have done it, Henry. Now we are lost," said my mother. My

father told her to not fret. as long as we have the GPS it will guide us to our destination. Sure enough, after twists and turns and struggle, the car came to a stop in front of a festive and decorated house, which was filled with ornaments and an evergreen door wreath with red berry mistletoe.

Then, came my aunt Judy, holding her red Merry Christmas cup. Aunt Judy was wearing red matching pajamas which looked comfy, but her disheveled dark hair did not seem to agree. We made our way to the door, every step we took felt suffocating. Eventually, the aroma of hot chocolate and marshmallows welcomed us. I then carefully slipped off my vans and was starstruck and captivated. There it was, a lush evergreen tree about 6 ft tall, beautifully decorated with colorful ornaments, gold glittery stars and candy canes. On top, there stood a gold star and the twinkling lights of the tree made it even more astonishing.

Starstruck, I couldn't take my eyes off of the splendid looking Christmas tree. As I strolled around the kitchen, I took a sip of the hot chocolate. The taste was pleasant and exquisite. Then, I took a bite of the snowy and white marshmallow that melted in my mouth. As I was feasting, my dad and Aunt Judy were having a disagreement. Sighing, of course, Aunt Judy was mad because we didn't visit her and Grandpa. Even though we wanted to, we couldn't dare risk Grandpa and visit him during a pandemic.

Making my way, down the hall. I came to a stop in front of a room. There, lay my grandpa in a soft baby blue satin sheet. He was sleeping peacefully; what a sight that was. Gradually, out of nowhere I whispered, "I love you" to my grandpa. I walked out and walked down the hall as I studied the creamy baby blue walls. After a couple of steps forward, I came to a stop in front of the kitchen. Astounded, I stood there analyzing the people in the kitchen.

There they were, my parents and Aunt Judy letting out a jolly laugh and seeming to be having a deep conversation. The whole scenario was warming my heart. Afterall, families are families and will eventually always seek each other once again. As I was about to take a step forward, everything gradually started to disappear and then vanished into thin air. A sudden thunderous lightning woke me up. My memories were scattered, and I was astounded, I then realized it was just a dream, far from reality. Maybe this was a sign from the universe, that all would be well soon. Maybe, I could visit my aunt and grandpa. I hope so. Someday, someday I will go home.

If I Quarantined in Mexico

Dyann Torres

When I first heard about Covid-19, I heard about it on the app TikTok. Everyone just started making jokes about it and no one was taking it seriously at the time. But then I heard it on the news and the number of cases was getting higher and higher every day, also globally. Everything happened so quick that, all of a sudden, all schools, stores around the world were getting shut down and people were going crazy and buying lots of food in order to survive and quarantine at home.

During quarantine, when school got shut down, myself and everyone else had no choice but to quarantine at home. If I could choose where I would be quarantined it would be Mexico. Mexico is very different from Indiana because my culture is in Mexico and there is lots of music, dancing, the best food in my opinion, and beautiful oceans. When I go to Mexico the air is different; it's fresher and you can feel the fresh breeze once you're there and especially when you go to the ocean. Every morning I hear a truck pass by a company that sells gas and it has a loud microphone so everyone can hear clearly. In downtown Mexico there are always salesmen shouting so they can get your attention selling food, clothes and anything you can get there.

I always see lots of people working hard out on the streets selling food, merchandise and having their little businesses to maintain their families. In every corner there are stores where you can get groceries, and necessities that you need for your family, yourself, and your house. There are lots of abandoned dogs in the streets. I would choose to be with my grandma during quarantine because I've only seen her once in my lifetime and I would want to spend so much time with her and get to know her more. She cooks the best food and bakes desserts. And I would want to help her with her baking business. Just make up the time lost over all these years.

Author Bios

Danalee Adams is a senior at Southport High School. Her favorite subjects have always been English and art because you get to express yourself more in those classes. Something interesting about her is that she was recently diagnosed with Type One Diabetes at almost seventeen, which is quite late to be diagnosed. She loves to write but usually doesn't submit her writing for others to read. Since she's a senior, she thought it would be fun to do something different before graduating high school.

Emiliano Aguilar Jr. is a Ph.D. Candidate in History at Northwestern University. A native to East Chicago, Indiana, he attended Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN, and majored in English and History. After completing his undergraduate degree, Emiliano attended Purdue University Northwest and earned his M.A. in History. A lifelong Hoosier and Region Rat, Emiliano currently lives in Whiting, Indiana with his partner and their three cats. Outside of his research, Emiliano is an avid reader and enjoys pulp fantasy novels and the works of Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, and Luis Alberto Urrea. Emiliano's hobbies include homebrewing and tabletop gaming.

Angel Hannah Akinleye, a senior at Riverside High School, is a freelance photographer and journalist. She pursues an interest in environmental sustainability through her work with Earth Charter Indiana. She was the U.S State Department Youth Ambassador to Brazil in 2019 and currently serves on the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council. She strives to create a positive impact on the Indianapolis community and around the world.

Caelea Armstrong is a 40-something teacher and librarian just trying to keep it together while searching for balance between being a light for others and self-preservation. Her life recently feels like a pin ball machine, and she ricochets from one extreme experience to the next. Coping strategies include curling up with animals, writing out what she would tell a therapist, and looking at properties on Zillow.

Michael Brockley is a 71-year old retired school psychologist who lives in Muncie, Indiana. His poems have recently appeared in *The Thieving Magpie*, *Unbroken* and *Last Stanza*. Poems are forthcoming in the *Indianapolis Anthology* and an as-yet untitled baseball anthology.

Jennifer Bostian is an online teacher and lives with her husband and three daughters in Zionsville, Indiana. She enjoys spending time with her family, reading, writing, art/crafts, hiking and traveling. is an online teacher and lives with her husband and three daughters in Zionsville, Indiana. She enjoys spending time with her family, reading, writing, art/crafts, hiking and traveling.

Mary M. Brown is a Hoosier, not by birth, but by long residence in Indiana and also by disposition. She lives with her husband Bill in Anderson. She taught literature and creative writing at Indiana Wesleyan for thirty years. You can find her poetry on the Poetry Foundation and American Life in Poetry Websites and in many litmags, journals, and anthologies. She is a former editor of *The Steinbeck Review* and the current poetry editor of *Flying Island*.

Ian S. Brundige is a junior at DePauw University studying English, history and film studies. He is a journalist and artist who had his start in media designing crossword puzzles for his middle school quarterly newsmagazine. Since then he has continued designing and writing earning Silver Crown from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association as the Editor of his high school newspaper, the Munster High School *Crier*. He is now the Editor-in-Chief of *The DePauw*, Indiana's oldest college newspaper.

Dan Carpenter is an Indianapolis-based freelance writer who has contributed poems, stories and articles to many publications. He has published two books of poems and two books of non-fiction.

Noelia Chavez is a 17-year-old senior at Christel House Academy. Some of her hobbies are playing volleyball, her favorite sport, and learning new things, like playing an instrument. She really enjoys weightlifting and loves traveling, especially if it's somewhere near a beach. After high school she wants to go to her dream college, Purdue University, to pursue a veterinarian career. She's always had a place in her heart for animals and can't wait to give back to the community.

Jade Cooper is in the 9th grade at Christel House Academy South. She enjoys reading and contemporary dancing, as well as playing the violin and the flute. She hopes to attend UCLA's medical school and go into the surgical field.

Anna Copeland is a high school student who lives in Indianapolis.

Bryn Cousins graduated with their Bachelor of Arts in English, concentration in Creative Writing, from IUPUI in August 2020. They have been writing for thirteen years and this is their first publication. Bryn is a non-binary person who has owned cats their entire life, and recently adopted two female kittens, Nebula and Solaris, after the passing of their beloved Athena. Their favorite genres to write are science fiction, fantasy, utopia/dystopia, and realistic fiction. They are hoping to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and a PhD in Literature at IU Bloomington in Fall 2021.

Rosaleen Crowley was born in Cork, Ireland. She graduated from University College Cork. She relocated to Carmel, Indiana in 1990. She is an Artist, Poet and Educator. *For the Sake of Rhyme*, her fourth book, gathers her rhyming poems from her trilogy, *Point of Connection*, *Point of Reflection*, and *Point of Perception* along with her pandemic poems which were published in anthologies, *PITTOC*, *Tipton Journal*, and *Carmel Creative Writers, Inc.* Rosaleen's volunteer positions include Welcome Chair, International Women Indiana (President 2018-2019) and Co-Founder/President, Carmel Creative Writers, Inc. She has read at many at Poetry Readings in Ireland and USA.

Jodie English is an attorney who has fought the death penalty since she was appointed to her first capital case in 1980 in North Carolina. She has taught criminal defense lawyers in twenty-seven states and was invited to Moscow to assist Russian defenders in making the transition from three-judge panels to twelve-person juries. She earned her BA in Biochemistry from Princeton University, her law degree at Northeastern and her MFA from Butler. She is passionate about justice, racism, climate change and her grandson Sovann. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, hiking, kayaking and in-depth conversations with friends and family.

Nyeshia Dentis is a senior at Christel House Academy South. She dabbles in everything and doesn't like to limit herself to one thing when there are many things she's good at and many more she can learn. She's a quiet person but that allows her to observe and learn things without having to communicate which is kind of like her superpower. She has sung her whole life and thought that was her path but is now realizing that life is full of opportunities. She is still learning herself but knows all will be accomplished.

Jaquelin Escobedo, fifteen years old, a sophomore at Christel House Academy. She is on the volleyball and cheerleading team. Besides sports, she also loves to read and watch Netflix. In the future she hopes to be an OB/GYN and attend college out of state.

Jason Gascoyne is a 10th grader at Christel House Academy South. He likes basketball, football and soccer, and he wants to be a lawyer.

Marjie Giffin is the author of four regional histories and the forthcoming poetry chapbook, *Touring*. Her poetry has appeared in *The World We Live(d) In* anthology and various literary journals, including the *Kurt Vonnegut Literary Journal*, *Tipton Literary Journal*, *Flying Island*, *Snapdragon*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Northwest Indiana Literary Journal*, and others. She has an M.A. from Butler University and has taught both college writing and gifted education.

Jonathan Hammack is a sophomore at Christel House Academy South. He spends most of his time playing on his computer but is very physically active. He loves to ride his bike around the neighborhood and meet new people. Cooking is another one of his passions; his grandmother and mom both helped teach him how to cook/bake. His future plans are to have his dream job of being an architect and to have a nice home to live in. He wants to live the simple life. Go to work then come home to a family.

Rachel Hedges is a native to Indianapolis. After earning her BA in Music and French from the University of Indianapolis, Rachel pursued advanced studies in Jazz Appreciation and Human Behavioral Management at the Chatterbox Tavern, where she holds a tenured position as a Senior Publican and Resident Crosspatch. For fun, Rachel owns and operates the toy company, Bebito. She's also a yoga instructor, an amateur botanical dye enthusiast, and sometimes a writer.

Maritza Hernandez is a student at Christel House Academy.

Alyssa Hill is a high school student who lives in Indianapolis.

Cara Howard lives in a suburb of Indianapolis with her husband, two school-aged children, and quirky little dog named Ruby. She makes sense of her world by writing essays and dabbles in poetry whenever the mood strikes. Her work has been published in *The Windhover*, and she is currently writing a memoir about her experience of motherhood. She can be found on Twitter at @carahowardin and on Facebook at @carahowardwriter.

Tony Huett is in the 10th grade at Christel House Academy. He likes to eat ice cream, and he wants to join the military.

Autumn Kelly attends Christel House Academy and is a senior this year. She wants everyone to know that quarantine has been really hard for all of us and just wanted to remind everyone that it'll get better with time!

Francia Kissel is (mostly) retired from teaching English at IUPUI but enjoys teaching one writing class per semester—the perfect part-time job, which gives her positive interaction with students. Teaching also keeps her writing. She still loves learning, too, and thanks to online classes, lectures, poetry readings, and more, she has the chance to satisfy her curiosity about scads of subjects. Best of all, she gets to share these passions with her grandkids—not in person, but online connections are powerful, too.

Norbert Krapf, former Indiana Poet Laureate, is the author of fourteen poetry

collections, the latest being *Indiana Hill Country Poems* (2019) and *Southwest by Midwest* (2020). Next year his *Homecomings: A Writer's Memoir*, covering the fifty years of his writing and publishing life, will appear. He has a poem in stained glass at the Indianapolis Airport, had his poems read on *The Writer's Almanac*, and won the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America.

Leah McNaughton Lederman is a writer and freelance editor from the Indianapolis area, where she lives with her husband and an assortment of children, cats, and dogs. She is the creator and editor of *Café Macabre: A Collection of Horror Short Stories and Art by Women*, released by SourcePoint Press in October 2019, and *A Novel of Shorts: The Woman No One Sees* released by Mothership Press in February 2020. Leah's short stories and poems have appeared in Scout Media's *A Matter of Words*, *A Contract of Words*, Clarendon House's *Fireburst* and *Cadence*, and Indie Author's Press *Issues of Tomorrow: A Sci-fi Anthology*.

Sophia Ling is a freshman at Emory University, thinking of studying political science and sociology. In the future, she would like to be a lawyer and, at some point, work with the United Nations. She has an addiction to chocolate, swimming, and coffee.

Tracy Mishkin is a call center veteran with a PhD and a graduate of the MFA program in Creative Writing at Butler University. She is the author of three chapbooks, *I Almost Didn't Make It to McDonald's* (Finishing Line Press, 2014), *The Night I Quit Flossing* (Five Oaks Press, 2016), and *This is Still Life* (Brain Mill Press, 2018). She lives in Indianapolis with her family and fewer than ten cats and dogs.

Cheryl Soden Moreland is among the poets in the award-winning *And Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana*, published by The Indiana Historical Society, as well as many other poetry anthologies locally and nationally, including *The Tipton Poetry Journal*. She was a contributing essayist to *Urban Tapestry: Indianapolis Stories* as well as *Undeniably Indiana*, both published by Indiana University Press. Cheryl is the author of two memoirs, *Kokomo Kid~~Reflections of Growing Up in Indiana's City of Firsts* and *Kokomo Kid Still Has Something to Say~~The Sequel*.

Lylanne Musselman is an award-winning poet, playwright, and artist, living in East Central Indiana. Her work has appeared in *Pank*, *Flying Island*, *The Tipton Poetry Journal*, *The New Verse News*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*, among others, and many anthologies. Musselman is the author of five chapbooks, a co-author of a volume of poetry, and author of the full-length poetry collection, *It's Not Love, Unfortunately* (Chatter House Press, 2018). She's currently working on another volume of poetry.

Kiera Noe is a student at Christel House Academy.

Jeff Rasley is the author of eleven books and numerous articles. His photographs of the Himalayas and Caribbean and Pacific islands have been published in several journals. Rasley is the founder of the Basa Village Foundation. He is the US liaison for Nepal-based Adventure GeoTreks and a writing coach and editor for Midsummer Books.

Jeremy Richard spent part of his childhood and adolescence in Indiana. Currently, he is an inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. He earned a certificate in auto mechanics and was named an assistant teacher. He spends his free time reading, writing, and listening to music.

April Ridge is a lover of all things poetry, a self-proclaimed weirdo, collector of rare and undiscovered tomes of beatnik writing, and a lover of animals. Except opossum. Opossum are creepy. She lives happily hidden in the woods in Monroe county with her lumberjack man and their two fluffy cats.

Patricia Russell has written and delivered papers for the Mars Society's national conventions. She graduated with a degree in communications and advertising. She was published in the book *On to Mars 2*, a compilation of space-related papers, and wrote two children's books that can be found at www.thewormholeadventures.com or www.pmrussell.com. Patricia has worked in retailing for 43 years, 35 of those years in the IT department. She has two children and one grandchild (all grown). She still works in retailing and continues to enjoy writing.

Christina Williams Sauter, who is originally from Indy, gratefully lives, loves, works, and writes from her home in Newfoundland in Canada. She's shared eight homes in 14 years with her incredible wife, Deanne. They have three beautiful and wild daughters (Marlee, Quinn, and Piper), two dogs, two cats, and a gerbil named Ping Pong.

John Schleeter has enjoyed telling stories (all true stories of course!) since childhood. Stories about life, exciting events, humor, family, just about any topic. I was fairly good at entertaining my listeners. As a young father, our three children seemed to enjoy my storytelling and now, as a grandfather, I attempt to entertain our seven grandchildren with many of the same tales. Over the last few years, my family has encouraged me to write my stories. Thinking that I wasn't a writer, I resisted until recently, when I joined a writer's group. I have truly enjoyed the experience. My writing skills are a bit primitive, but that's okay, as writing has brought tremendous joy to my life.

Mary Sexson is the author of *103 in the Light, Selected Poems 1996-2000* (Restoration Press), co-author of *Company of Women, New and Selected Poems* (Chatter House Press). Her poetry has appeared in *Flying Island*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Hoosier Lit*, *New Verse News*, *Reckless Writing*, *The Best of Flying Island*, and others. Sexson's most recent work is in *Last Stanza Poetry Journal: Marginalia* (Stackfreed Press 2020). Her work is archived in Inverse Poetry Archives, for Hoosier Poets. In 2019 she was part of the Indiana Writer's Center project, *The World We Live(d) In*, with interpretive dance by Dance Kaleidoscope.

Laurel Smith lives and writes in Vincennes, Indiana. At Vincennes University she worked as Professor of English, Director of the Honors Program, and Provost before her retirement. Smith's poetry has appeared in various periodicals, including *Natural Bridge*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Flying Island*, *Tipton Review*, *English Journal*, *JAMA: Journal of the AMA*; also, in the following anthologies: *And Know This Place*, *Visiting Frost*, and *Mapping the Muse*. She is co-author of *Early Works by Modern Women Writers* (Mellen 2006).

Elisabeth Giffin Speckman received her MFA in Fiction from Butler University, where she serves as Director of the Butler Bridge Program. She has taught classes at both Butler and IUPUI as well as several Indianapolis-area youth theatres. As an actor, Elisabeth has appeared in productions at Booth Tarkington Civic Theatre, Carmel Community Players, IndyFringe, The Cat, and more. As a playwright, her plays have been produced across the US, as well as in the UK, Canada, and Israel. Other work appears in *CHEAP POP*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Three Line Poetry*, and *Midwestern Gothic*.

Ania Spyra grew up in Polish Upper Silesia, studied in Stockholm and Iowa City, and now teaches at Butler University. She has published academic and creative nonfiction in, among others, *Studies in the Novel*, *Comparative Literature*, *Contemporary Literature* and *Colorado Review*. Her visual poetry is forthcoming in *The Indianapolis Review*.

Esther Sui is a high school student who lives in Indianapolis.

Jim Thompson is an aeronautical engineer and a retired Air Force officer. He served in Viet Nam from 1971-1972. He retired from the Air Force in 1980 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and came back to Indiana where he has been writing seriously for the past several years. He has completed eight novels and a number of short stories and essays. Several short stories have been published in various anthologies and local publications.

Dyann Torres is in the 9th grade at Christel House Academy South. She loves to dance, hang out, and go out with her friends and family. She also love to travel, go on vacation, and experience lots of things, including cooking with her mom. Her future plans are to graduate from high school, go to college, and become a labor and delivery nurse, or anything in the medical field. Most importantly, she wants to work on herself and become independent and secure.

Carol Gossett Thorne is a life-long Indiana resident, now living in Fishers, IN. She graduated from Ball State University with a BS Medical Technology, retiring after a long career at Roche Diagnostics. Carol enjoys travel, camping, sailing, Tai Chi, and singing with her church choir and the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir. She is also an Indiana State Fair Champion baker. She is most proud of her part in raising six wonderful children who are now all amazing adults. With children and grandchildren scattered throughout the US, including Philadelphia, Texas, and Arizona, she will be ready to travel again as soon as it is safe.

Suzanne Walker is the librarian at the Indiana Young Readers Center in the Indiana State Library. She is the Director of the Indiana Center for the Book, an Affiliate of the Library of Congress. You can find her on YouTube interviewing Indiana Authors in a series called Toucan Tuesdays.

What It Was and Will Be
Performed by Dance Kaleidoscope Dancers

Shut In

by Nyeshia Dentis
choreographer Aaron Steinberg

Ode to My Student Who is Starving

by Jodie English
choreographer Marie Kuhns

Intwisted Perspective

by Jaquelin Escobedo
choreographers Aleksa Lukasiewicz and Emily Dyson

Ballad for the Silent Stage

by Rachel Hedges
choreographer Missy Thompson

My Bleeding Heart

by Leah Lederman
choreographer Natalie Clevenger

Waiting for the Fever

by Jeremy Richard
choreographer Paige Robinson

In the End

by Christina Williams Saulter
choreographer Manuel Valdes

Close

by Mary Sexon
choreographer Sarah Taylor

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by Elisabeth Giffin Speckman
choreographer Aleksa Lukasiewicz

...But Some of Us are Looking at the Stars

by Ania Spyra
choreographer Stuart Coleman

Dance Kaleidoscope Dancers

Natalie Clevenger, originally from Mooresville, IN, began her dance training at The Dance Refinery in Indianapolis, where she competed throughout the United States. In the fall of 2018, she graduated from the University of Arizona with a BFA in dance, and a minor in Japanese. Upon graduation, Natalie received the Gertrude Shurr award for modern dance.. Our 2020-21 season is Natalie's 2nd year with DK as an Apprentice Dancer.

Stuart Coleman is a dancer in his 7th season with DK, and has been promoted to Artistic Associate. Stuart began dancing in Lynchburg, Virginia with Keith Lee and then at Virginia School of the Arts. He graduated cum laude from Butler University with dance departmental honors in 2014. His choreography has been featured in concerts produced by Dance Kaleidoscope, Phoenix Rising Dance Company, Ballet Theatre of Indiana and Butler Ballet. The Arts Council of Indianapolis named Stuart a Robert D. Beckmann, Jr. Emerging Artist Fellow in 2015.

Emily Dyson received her BFA in Ballet Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma, where she performed with Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma. She began ballet training in Houston, TX with Gilbert Rome and Victoria Vittum and was later inspired by Austin Hartel to study modern. This is Emily's 10th season with the company.

Emily Franks began dancing at the age of 10 at The Woodlands Dance Center in The Woodlands, Texas under the direction of Regan Jurick. She continued her dance training at the University of Oklahoma under Austin Hartel and Roxanne Lyst, Emily has attended intensives with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Nobel Motion. Our 2020-21 season is Emily's 3rd year with the company.

Kieran King is from Mesquite, Texas. At the age of 19, he began his dance training at Collin County Community College in Plano, Texas. With a focus in Ballet Performance, he continued his studies at The University of Oklahoma, where he performed with both Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma under the direction of Michael Bearden, Austin Hartel, and Roxanne Lyst. Our 2020-21 season is Kieran's 2nd year with DK.

Marie Kuhns received her BFA from the University of Oklahoma in modern dance

performance under the direction and guidance of Austin Hartel. She grew up in Silver City, New Mexico, and trained at the Conservatory of Dance along with New Mexico School for the Arts in Santa Fe. Our 2020-21 season is Marie's 5th year with DK.

Aleksa Lukasiwicz originally from Novi, Michigan graduated from Butler University in 2011 with honors and a BFA in Dance Performance. Aleksa's training also includes summer intensives such as Hubbard Street and a two-month study abroad trip to Lithuania. Aleksa has been with Dance Kaleidoscope for 10 seasons.

Cody Miley was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He attended McLennan Community College in Waco, TX where he began his dance training. He transferred to Sam Houston State University and received his B.F.A. in acting and directing. He is a founding member of Nicolay Dance Works led by the artistic direction of Dana Nicolay. Our 2020-21 season is Cody's 5th year with DK.

Paige Robinson grew up dancing in the Chicago area, studying at Dance Center Evanston, Chicago Ballet Arts, and Giordano Dance Center and was a scholarship dancer at Lou Conte Dance Studio under Claire Bataille. Paige spent two years in Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre's Graduate Program and has performed and toured with Eugene Ballet Company. Other training includes Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet, and The Martha Graham School. DK's 2020-21 season is Paige's 6th year with the company.

Missy Thompson began her training at age three with gymnastics, continuing for thirteen years as a competitive gymnast. She also studied modern dance, ballet, and jazz at Rhythm Nations Studio in Euless, TX. Missy is a graduate of the Indiana University Modern Dance program and has attended the Martha Graham summer Dance intensive in New York. DK's 2020-21 season is Missy's 8th with the company.

Aaron Steinberg is originally from Tenafly, New Jersey. He began his formal ballet training at the University of Oklahoma in 2010 and later attended the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at American Ballet Theatre and the Hamburg Ballet School. Aaron has been a member of The Sarasota Ballet, Kansas City Ballet's second company, Nashville Ballet, Indianapolis Ballet. Our 2020-21 season is Aaron's 2nd year with DK.

Sarah Taylor hails from Portland, OR, where she began ballet training under the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus and passed every major examination with distinction. She has performed with Ballet Concerto, Lake Erie Ballet, SoMar Dance Works and Northwest Dance Theatre. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from Mercyhurst

University with a B.F.A. degree in dance where she was granted both dance and academic scholarships. Our 2020-21 season is Sarah's 2nd year with DK as an Apprentice Dancer.

Manuel Valdes began gymnastics training at the age of five in Dallas, TX and continued as a competitive gymnast for 12 years. He began dancing at Dallas Black Dance Theater and went on to receive his BFA of Modern Dance Performance from the University of Oklahoma under the direction of Austin Hartel and Roxanne Lyst. Manuel has attended intensives with Paul Taylor American Dance Theater, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, BODYTRAFFIC and SALT. Our 2020-21 season is Manuel's 4th year with DK.

Writing Prompts

Kurt Vonnegut said, “What is the purpose of life? ... To be the eyes, and ears, and conscience of the creator of the universe; you fool.” Be the eyes, ears, and conscience of the creator of the universe (whatever/whomever you believe the creator is) by writing about an incident pertaining to the virus that you feel it’s important for people to know.

How has your perception of time changed over the months of being shut in? How have the markers by which you usually track time changed? Do you find that you have more or less time of your own? How does this affect how you feel about your life? When the virus is over, do you think you will manage time differently than you did before the virus changed your day-to-day life?

Consider all that’s happened surrounding the Covid-19 virus, so far. Imagine what the world will be like when (sooner or later) the crisis is over. Free-write a letter to someone not born yet—a grandchild, health care worker, essential care worker—anyone, really. Tell them what this time was like, what you learned, what you think should be remembered. Share your hope for what the world will be like when (sooner or later) the crisis is over. Be as specific as you can be

Write about how someone close to you is weathering the quarantine. It might be someone with you in quarantine or someone who’s quarantining elsewhere. How do they spend their time? What has surprised you about them? Have you learned anything new about them? What worries you about them? Has their behavior changed during this time? If so, how? What do you think they miss most? What makes you think this? What do you think they might like about being in quarantine? Do you think they’ll be different in some way when it’s over? If so, how?

Write about what you find yourself doing (or not doing) during this time that gives you that “(slightly-guilty) secret glee.” Anything, no matter how small, that surprises, satisfies or gives you pleasure. Describe it in detail first, then reflect. How do you think this might affect the way you live your life when this time is over? What, if anything, have you learned from it?

What do you miss doing? What might you be doing (or about to do) that you can’t do because of the quarantine? Write what you miss about it and/or write it as if you *are*

doing it. If it's something you always do at this time of the year, feel free to include the history of doing this thing. If it's something you've never done before, feel free to write about what you imagined/hoped it would be. It might be an ordinary thing or something special.

Consider a holiday or annual celebration (a birthday, anniversary, Labor Day). Write about what it means to you, how you usually spend the day, how you plan to spend it this year, and how you think this annual celebration might be different in the future.

The last day of school, the beginning of summer mark a shift in day-to-day life for almost everyone. If you have kids, write about their last day of school—how it was different from last days in the past and how your day-to-day life will be affected by Covid-19 as we shift as we move into summer. If you're not affected by the end of school, think about your own experiences as a child (or perhaps as a teacher) and write about something that kids today can't do because of Covid-19 and might never be able to do again. Or write about how summer plans have changed because of the virus.

Write about how the first day of school has been affected by concerns about the virus and how it will be different from the way it usually is. Write about how the first day of school was for you as a young person and how it will be different for your children. If you're a teacher, write about the first day from your point of view—what are your concerns, how will it be and feel different from first days in the past? What are your general concerns about the effect of the corona virus on American education?

What is your gut reaction to the reopening of schools, businesses, churches and other places where people gather? Write to explore *why* this is your instinctive reaction and what the repercussions of opening might be if you are right (or wrong.) Balance your feelings with ideas/logic/images. If it interests you, try freewriting a dialogue in which you argue with someone whose gut reaction is the opposite of yours.

There are so many ways of being engaged in addressing the problems our country faces, many of which have been highlighted and complicated by Covid19. Nobody can do everything, but how do you know what *you* can do? How can you know when you're choosing a response to the virus that is comfortable for you when you should consider taking what you know you can do outside your comfort zone and risk doing it in a new way? How might you do what you know you can do in a new way?

Write about something ordinary that you see every single day in quarantine. Has it changed in any way over this period of time? Have you changed in a way that makes you feel differently about it? Do others in quarantine with you notice, use, or comment

on this thing? Will it still be there once quarantine is over? If not, what will you do with it?

Describe a meal you can't have in quarantine (for whatever reason), where you'd have it, and who you'd have it with. When did you last have it? With whom? If you had the chance, is there anything you'd change about that experience? Will you "do" the meal differently when it possible to have it again?

Write about something you think will disappear or change significantly as a result of the pandemic as if you are preserving it to be discovered by a writer doing research for a historical novel to be set any time before 2020. What would a writer need to know to be able to write a historically accurate scene set in that era? Better yet, write that scene.

Write about how you think the Covid-19 situation may have shaped, fueled, and/or intensified the Black Lives Matter protests and how you think the way in which the virus has highlighted this and so many other many problems in our culture might affect how we look at those problem and work to solve them.

Describe something you desperately wanted or wanted to do as a child or adolescent and how it felt not to be able to have or do it. Think about how this was like and unlike what you desperately want or want to do now—and can't.

So much of our response the virus has been angry, frustrated, fearful—and worse. But there are moments that seem so absurd that you just have to laugh. Some of the memes and parodies that have emerged have been hilariously on target. Even some of the most egregious stupidities and breaches of logic can seem (well, briefly) funny. Write about how your sense of humor has been challenged and enriched during this time, and why you think a sense of humor (not to mention irony) is an asset in the worst of times.

Rituals—or the tasks we reform repeatedly, not for what they accomplish but for what they mean to us—can mark time in our day, calm us, and/or help us prepare for challenges. Describe a personal ritual and describe it's benefits to you. It might be a ritual you've had for a long time or one that you developed during these past months. If it's a longtime ritual and the virus has affected how you perform it or made it impossible to perform, describe how the change or loss has affected you.

Write about what happened to someone you know who was physically affected by the virus by testing positive, being sick with it, or even dying. It might be someone who is an essential worker, facing the possibility of being exposed to the virus in their job. How did

you find out about it? How were you able to help? What was most upsetting to you about it?

Write a letter to future historians, telling them what they need to know to fully understand what it was like to be alive during the 2020 Pandemic—not just generally, but from your personal point of view.

Day-in-the-Life. Choose a day, brainstorm all the details you can remember about that day, jotting them down. Put them in the correct sequence, make a list of the details that best capture the feeling of that particular day, and write the story of that day.

Getting Your Thoughts on the Page

I Remember

Write “I remember...” and the first memory that comes to mind. Keep doing this for 3-5 minutes, repeating “I remember” each time, writing no more than two—three, tops—sentences per memory. Write quickly, don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, or the order in which the memories come. (They will be all over the place!) Don’t worry about the memories being silly or inconsequential, either. Just remember. Because the flow of memories comes from your right brain, most if not all of the memories will have a visual, even cinematic quality. (Note: Writing “I Remember” every time keeps the writer in the visual part of the brain when students can write fast enough to get a rhythm going. Listing shifts the task to the left brain, which will try to bring order to it too soon.)

Count the number of memories you have. Consider each one the first draft of a piece of writing you might develop. Then choose one that you want to write about. (NOTE: Discourage students from writing about memories that cover a long period of time. For example, instead of writing about a vacation to Florida, choose a memory from that trip.)

Choose one of the memories to work with.

Repeat the “I Remember” exercise for the memory, writing down as many details about it as you can remember.

Freewrite the story of that memory, using the details you remembered (it’s okay not to use all of them) and feeling free to add new ones that come into your mind. If you get stuck, look at your list of details and just start writing about any one of them. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, organization—any of that. (NOTE: “Tricks” to help students overcome anxiety include writing in the present tense, writing the memory as if they’re writing it in a letter to someone they love, or writing down the story of the movie in their mind.)

Read your draft. Underline sentences and phrases you like, cross out things that you don’t need. Add details that will make the story stronger and clearer. Does something in the middle seem like a good beginning? Move it up. In fact, you might even cut the drafts into chunks and fool around, rearranging them. (Note: If there’s time, students

can exchange papers and ask questions and make observations to help each other set revision tasks.

Standing in the Image **(Adapted from an exercise by Lynda Barry)**

Close your eyes, relax, breathe deeply, and let your memory come into your mind's eye. Look straight ahead into the memory. What do you see? Look to the left, to the right. Look down, up, behind you.

What do you hear in the scene?
What do you smell, taste, touch?

Quickly make a list of all of the details you noticed.

Now freewrite about the picture in your mind.

Note: this exercise can be used alone to generate freewriting and/or used with the "I Remember" exercise, either after writing the focused set of "I Remembers" or after the freewriting as a way to generate new details for the second draft

Who, What, Where, When, and How?

Jot down answers to these questions after you freewrite to dredge up details to expand and enrich your second draft.

- Who was in the memory? (Describe them.)
- What were those individuals doing in the memory? (Let's see and hear them.)
- Where does the memory take place? (Describe the setting or settings)
- When does the memory take place? (Day, date, time of day)
- How did the events unfold? (What got things going, what happened next...and next?)
- How did the memory end?
- Was there anything that had happened or was happening outside the memory itself that affected it somehow?