Bearing Witness

IWWG Writers on the Pandemic
I woke this morning
and forgot what day it was.

Put the trash cans at the curb,
but they don't pick up today.

Scrambled some eggs and buttered a slice of toast,
but forgot to feed the dog.

Drove to work
but it's Saturday; I don't work on Saturdays.

Called my mother to remind her to wash her hands,
to practice social distancing, to stay safe.
but then remembered…

She died three months ago
and I've forgotten how to sleep,
or cry,
or pray.

They don't have any prejudices!

Over my eyes, there is a constant shade,
as if cast by the visor of a red baseball hat.
COVID-19 is the disease,
SARS-Cov-2 is the bug.
Desire to multiply of a tenth of a micron germ,
trumps human life.

“Going viral” will never be cool again!

Floating in the pond is a severed sprig,
of the giant weeping willow.
Translucent-parrot-green-baby shoots,
still reaching for the sky.
No roots to feed,
yet making breath from thin air!
Stereo-speakers to my right and then to my left.
a cacophony of far off birds,
Nature is sheltering and thriving in place,
nothing unusual about that!

Xylem, not a bad straw,
has come alive.
Concentric rings of frogs plopping,
from the edge of the pond where I go walking.
Reverie broken by the socks—wet,
inches away from a hole a wasp is hovering,
Broken wing and all, life still goes on!

Get up early, go to work or school,
hustle through your day and think
about how good it will be to go home. Not so long ago, memory
recalls various friends and family
sharing how they wish they could just stay home.

Fast forward into the unprecedented situation our world
is facing – and how many U.S. states and countries have

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ordered individuals to do just that thing. Stay home! Now, those same individuals are struggling to follow those orders and craving for their previous way of life back.

So, is the grass always greener? Reenergize at home or hustle through life? There are certainly vital aspects of the way we lived that need to go back, but are we also considering aspects that may be best left behind?

This could be a second chance moment to “clean out our in-boxes” and evaluate who and what we are really missing and what matters. Individuals often shared how consistently busy they were in the previous high-paced world, and now feeling lost with this forced slowdown time.

Whether it was productive busy or glorified busy, by using this time to refocus on what we can control for the positive may help us stay authentically busy. Who we surround ourselves with, what we digest through our minds and mouths, how we can create and give back not only makes us feel better, but helps our world heal and be ultimately better.

Let’s forgive ourselves for losing our way, for hurting ourselves and those we refused to understand.

Let’s turn the ear of our hearts to Earth’s voice, her sorrow, her suffering. Let’s vow each morning to become wiser, practice simple acts of gratitude. Despite our craven rantings, Earth supports us daily.

Ask forgiveness for being too busy to thank Cosmos and Earth for sustaining our lives.

Sun still rises, trees still release oxygen. Morning still breaks. May it break us open.

We are all in this together, one people, one consciousness, one planet circling a small star in a mammoth cosmos.

We’ve been thrown together on Earth’s magnificent playground where the abundance is meant for all.

Now we know: The Other is just another one of us. If a killer virus can skip anywhere, how important are borders?

We know that now. Let’s live into the knowing. Implore the gods to change us in deep and lasting ways, in ways we cannot now imagine.

Let’s come together as One people. Let’s rise together as if dead. (In many ways we were dead.) Let us begin anew. All of us. Let us begin anew.

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A New Beginning

Deborah Burke

Let’s start over as a couple might who love each other or hope to again.

Let’s begin by looking at one another without judging absolutely anything. Starting over begins with each of us.

As we daily disinfect, look deeper for that thought or word that became a lit match that burned someone.

May this time of Covid-19 change us the perpetrators of our dis-ease, the unwitting agents of this novel disease.
Goals and Covid-19
Maline Carroll

I was doing well until my belly began to swell
Because I kept drinking all that Fizz.
My motivation fell and I had entered a state of Hell
Eating horizontally became my life that “IS.”

As family and friends pass from this Flu
That is nothing like an actual flu at all.
We brace ourselves as no one knew
Our only contact with them might be a distant call.
We are left with instructions to not touch our face
Which is the first thing we touch out of fear.
This virus is advancing at such a fast pace
With no time to shed even a tear.

But we move on with our lives like they did during
the depression
And we continue to hold onto what is good.
Many of us may have the virus but fail to go to confession
Even though we know we should.

But being separated from our loved ones and friends
so near
Is real and right up in our faces.
We are trying to just live even in our fear
Though we may be going to higher places.

Our goals have changed just a little bit,
maybe now smaller or even bigger
We are now just a little more or less less fit
And a sneeze or a cough is a trigger

It causes people to hate and judge another race
Though the mask covers their face
The fear is so great but humans are greater
We must focus on the goal to finish this race.

Embrace the Virus
Beth J. Cash

The woman who makes my flower essences
told me to embrace the virus.
I see an image of me
with outstretched arms
trying to welcome it,
not fight it
not be afraid.

The next image
is the Cat in the Hat
with a giant red bag
cleaning up messes.
I want to grab
the viruses by their non-existent
scrawny necks
toss them into my red bag.

I want to grab them off doorknobs
shopping carts, toys
and walkers.
Hunt down each virus
so no one needs a ventilator,
suck them from
droplets in the air
and dump them into the red bag.

I will tie the bag tightly
and toss it into
a volcano.

Ever Not Quite
Barb Coppus

They say we are having more seismic rumblings since
the globe has paused airplanes, mass transit, automobiles
and feet, and scientists are having a field day. Of course
our planet is still trembling, as are many people in self-
quarantine. Royal Observatory of Belgium seismologist
Thomas Lecocq appears to have been one of the first to

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notice this cacophony of diminution. London, Palo Alto, Mexico City, Paris, Ecuador, Croatia, Nepal, some places measuring anywhere from 20% to 80% less noise, less seismic movement. Now if we could only ask elephants to shelter in place.

So what is all this isolated distancing to people? I imagine thousands with anxiety, depression and loneliness must be hardest hit, besides those being ill. This seclusion a backdrop for perhaps hundreds of thousands will cause them to internal retreat with their own ceaseless noise. And what about mental wards and those six feet. Aides, nurses, doctors, other patients. And you.

But earth’s oscillations subsiding, and couldn’t all that “busyness” pulled up render a calming effect as well? Scientists with fiber optic networks can consequently measure the murmurs of river waters, small earthquakes, aftershocks, volcanic activity. The earth itself slowing, the movement within the planet, the lessening vibrations. The upper crust crawling. A silhouette of the anxious, suicidal, disenfranchised. Scientists ponder whether there will be less melting in the Arctic, reports verify fewer carbon emissions, less pollution, climate change, and then there are those of us who remain—uncounted, unclaimed and unattended, the loss of familiarity and grace.

In 1950, my mother was 36, my brother three, and I was five. A Community Chest mobile medical van came to our small town testing for tuberculosis. My mother was the only person in town who tested positive. When my father called us to their bedroom, my mother was sitting up in bed wearing a silky white bed jacket, my father’s arm around her shoulders. “Mommy is going into the hospital for a while,” he said.

“A while” became almost three years. During that time, my brother and I saw our mother twice, once early in her confinement, before she became dangerously ill. The second time, my father snuck us into the sanatorium as far as her room when an apologetic nurse shuttled us out the building. Other times, my brother and I waited outside the hospital and waved to a window. Our parents thought we could see Mommy, perhaps an illusion to make them feel better, but a memory frozen in severe pain for us.

Our mother, cured by a new drug, finally returned home, Grammy left after years of loving care, and my father gave more time to his work. My brother and I were alone with a confused, physically weak, and angry mother. The two of us banded together, a team of two, bumping down the front stairs in my father’s green army sleeping bag or hiding behind the sofa when things got tough. Now, grandparents, we wish we could inoculate today’s children against the side effects of infectious disease.

Social distance. What’s social about that? I’d like to pan that idea. Swing the camera to pan the whole view. People are gathering because it doesn’t apply to them. Demi=rare or local population of organisms. Deme=people, commons. It will affect you, if you are one of the people.

Picture a person walking down the boardwalk with a loaded gun. He doesn’t know when it will go off or who it will hit, but it’s a matter of time. That’s the people who won’t stay home. They stroll along, they are well, but carrying the virus. They don’t understand that we are all in this together. Bang, you get it.

We are in a pandemic. Pan means all inclusive. That means you out there, and me. Pan is a stratum of compacted soil. Hard not yielding. You got it. It’s hard and hard to get rid of.

Yes, we are our brother’s keeper. The surprising thing is if we take care of others, we take care of ourselves. This is an opportunity to show our humanity, our love.

Let’s hope things pan out for all of us. That we don’t lose our loved ones from arrogance, and ignorance. We need each other now. Follow what the CDC tells us. Live and be well.
I long for a massage. I dream of lying on a massage bed in a small, darkened room. The warmth from the heated bed creeps up into my muscles, inviting them to soften. The recorded sound of ocean waves breaking over the shore begins to hypnotize me, rhythmically crashing, receding, crashing, receding. The faint smell of the lavender oil drifts under my nose and the taste of the lemon water I recently sipped is still in my mouth.

With his powerful hands, the faceless therapist gently strokes each limb, coaxing my muscles from their tightened frightened state. And the herb-filled roll under my neck invites it to take a break from the burden of holding my head up high.

Over my eyes is a soft mask. It blocks my eyes' access to local distractions and allows me to wander unhurried inside my mind and see new things.

Drifting, drifting in and out of consciousness, I surrender. I am touched by another human being, grounded in warmth, and feeling peaceful and safe.

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The original hunter-gathers did not experience epidemics, but once they settled down, built villages and domesticated animals that harbored transmissible pathogens, things changed. We read in Exodus that Yahweh brought upon Pharaoh numerous plagues, forcing him to let the captive Israelites leave for the promised land. Since then, history records numerous outbreaks: cholera, the Black Death, typhus, tuberculosis, yellow fever, smallpox, measles, influenza, AIDS, Ebola. Were these also inflicted by Yahweh?

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Co-habiting With COVID

Alice Faryna

There is time now
To light a candle
Bring it to the dark
Move the flame to crevices
See what I ignore
Face the dark I abhor

There is time now
To sit at the firepit
Draw in my family
Talk of dark's genesis
See what we ignore
Face the dark we abhor

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Needing Touch During the Corona Quarantine

Diana Eden

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There is my version of a 19th century editorial about Santa Claus: “Yes Virginia there is a God, and her name is Gaia, the earth goddess.” Gaia is devoted to nurturing the earth, with no particular species favored. Has Gaia, enraged at the warming of her planet, the devastation of ecosystems, and loss of many species, decided that periodic pruning of her most destructive species is needed?

This is our third coronavirus epidemic in a decade. The first two were contained rapidly, but COVID -19 has caused unique disruptions. Stay at home! Wash hands! Don't shake hands! Schools, businesses, and entertainment events are closed. Hospitals are inundated, and unidentified bodies in New York are sent to Hart Island for mass burial. The economy suffers from massive unemployment and lack of commerce. Some say the cure is worse than the disease, as projected deaths appear to be far less than the 50 million people who died in the 1918 flu pandemic.

Gaia shrugs, pleased to see less pollution in the air as the streets are bereft of vehicles. The icebergs will grow again, and the oceans cool. The next generation will wonder why no one hugs or shakes hands. The population will grow and travel. Gaia will get out her pruning shears again.

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Splinters of Wood Series
Ashen Wood

Linda Flickinger

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continued
The Future is Waiting  

B. Lynn Goodwin

“It’s been over six weeks since I gave notice at my marketing day job. I spent those final 10 work days, or 4,800 minutes, finishing up projects and making promises to myself. Oh yes, once I was free of that dank little cubicle and all the fifth-grade-style bullying, all the switching deadlines and whispery alliances, I would take a wild vacation. Sleeping late. Visiting with friends. A writer’s retreat to complete all my stalled projects. Actually, spring was almost here, so heck, let’s do a beachside writer’s retreat with a water-view room and a gourmet restaurant.

Of course, it didn’t happen that way. The day after I handed in my work badge, our governor declared a statewide Covid-19 lockdown. So no visits with friends. No beachside retreat. No exotic dinners.

Instead, like all of us, I am spending the time at home, where I worry about and check in on loved ones while baking bread and researching how to help or advocate for those who are not as lucky as I am. On my daily walks and at the grocery store, I listen to my own breaths against my CDC-sanctioned face mask. But I’m sleeping through the night now. And, every morning, I’m writing in my journal and on my computer and designing a Zoom class on writing for stress release.

None of us wants this. But (I see now) I needed this. I needed fallow time. I needed silence. I needed this journal and this pen because that’s how I recover. That’s how I come home to me.

Áine Greaney

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For me, this pandemic has awakened a sense of self-examination, one that has allowed time to get back to one of my gifts, which is my writing. Before this pandemic,
I was worrying about things that seem so miniscule compared to what is going on now. Despite the panic, chaos, and tragedy that has accompanied the current pandemic running rampant in our world, there is a heightened sense of enlightenment. We put stock into what the world holds for us, and we forget the important things. The restrictions and precautions being taken by each individual to prevent and deter the spread of the coronavirus are teaching the world that the material things and activities that we take for granted hold no superior significance to what matters most. This pandemic is bringing a sense of togetherness, allowing families to spend more time with each other, appreciating quality time that once was once occupied by going out, work, etc. It is allowing us to appreciate each other more, to put aside differences, and mend bridges, because we are all affected by this pandemic. It has also awakened a spiritual nature that requires us to reconnect with God. There are many that have succumbed to this virus and lost their lives. There are so many that have lost their livelihoods, I sit on the bathroom’s tile floor, Tackle the clutter under the sink; Bottles of unnecessary nail polish remover, moisturizer out of date, stockpile of tooth paste remove to linen closet. Reminder, when I have time I am neater than I know.

In days to follow, time stands still and so will I. I will feel heavy, sleepy, will watch TV, no project in hand. I will be a sloth, enervated, I will crawl, hang from a branch, upside down. From this vantage point I will see the world, itself turned upside down.

A week into our Covid 19 quarantine, my extended family started a Zoom book club. Fifteen of us meet weekly. We range in age from 12 years-old to 81 years-young and live in five states. Most of us are Caucasian, except there are two African Americans and two who are mixed-race.

One of my nephews, who’s thirteen and was born in Ethiopia, chose our first book, Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You, by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi. The words powerful, enlightening and profound don’t even begin to describe this book. I’ve been shocked not only by how much I don’t know but also how much I thought I knew that was just plain wrong. As the old proverb says, “Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” In this case, the hunter is the white man, and he’s been spinning false tales since he arrived on American soil. (Suffice it to say, I’ve scratched visiting Mt. Rushmore off my bucket list!)

And while I appreciate being schooled on racism and antiracism, and immensely enjoy our lively and thought-

**Quarantine Time**

*Barbara Hyde Haber*

Endless time, full breaths, in through nose, out through mouth. Breaths bound to yoga practice, now through all the day. Long breaths; boil water, wash hands to Happy Birthday. Every movement slowed, time stretches. If not today, tomorrow. Broil chicken with Chinese 5 spices. Time to explore, investigate unknown condiment, to dust off food processor, grind a facsimile. Olive oil in pantry, garlic pods in freezer. Prepared. Prepared for uncertainty. Reminder, I like to cook, to bake. Reminder, when I have time I am a good cook.

I watch TV accompanied by abandoned knitting project; blanket large enough to embrace a giant. I start a third panel. I remember how to knit, my stitches are even. Reminder, when I have the time I am a good knitter.

**Our Silver Lining Book Club**

*Martha Hunt Handler*

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Monday, maybe it was Monday, I finished 2 loads of laundry. In addition to socks and underwear, there were 23 T-shirts and 4 pajama pants. That’s all. Wednesday, I think it was Wednesday, when I was late from the shower before a virtual meeting, I rushed to log in wearing a shirt and a towel. A towel. For work. At what point should I be concerned about my work-from-home fashion situation?

Despite the wardrobe, my quarantine accomplishments are impressive. Teaching classes online, re-painting 2 rooms, completing yard work, dropping groceries to a friend. Yet, I wonder if it is enough. Underlying worry tricks me into thinking I can’t be productive if my brain is constantly consumed with uncertainty.

We are all shouldering so much worry. My son heads out to work at the pharmacy each day. My daughter is missing all those great memories that come with spring sports and prom and driving. My wife is wondering how her small business will survive now that she is out of work and unable to collect unemployment. My friend’s parents are both on ventilators. My students are obviously struggling. And I’m worrying about all of it. All. The. Time.

I know I need to be kind to myself, but I’m struggling. I’ve turned off the news. I’ve walked outside each day. But worry dominates my every moment. I’m not quite sure what to do with that, but at least I’ll figure it out wearing clean pajamas.

As a Christian woman, I took going to church for granted. It started with my mom taking me, and then I joined a local church and accepted Christ. I’ve been a church member for over 30 years, so it has been the norm for me.


Easter is what my whole faith and Christian relationship is founded on. We were taught to follow the laws of the land, but also to follow the Bible. If we don’t follow our officials, social pressure and enforcement will ensue. But what if Christians don’t stand on our faith and refuse to follow God? The meaning of Easter supersedes the law.

So as a Christian, married to a pastor, what do I do when my faith is questioned? I haven’t had this sense of indecisiveness before. Not until a threat came to shut our church doors. I never thought the day would come where we couldn’t hug and shake hands with fellow parishioners. The day is here where we wear masks and gloves to church, sanitizing microphones and spraying Lysol.

This Resurrection Day will be different. While doing my best to follow both my faith and my local leadership, I know that the church is not a building, but it is in my heart.
Our friendship was unexpected. Two adults drawn together, navigating the turbulent waters of single parenthood. Here we are, a decade later, nestled in a cabin in the woods with our two daughters, hiding from a virus that caused a global pandemic.

I underestimated the complexities of sharing a virtual workspace with college students, and I was unprepared for the feelings I was developing for this friend of mine. I stood in the door wall of the sliding glass door, watching him. He cast the line of his fishing pole into the lake. His back to me; broad shoulders relaxed under an old corduroy fishing shirt. Jeans hung loosely on his thin, long legs. Locks of wavy dark hair peeking out from underneath his camouflage ballcap enhanced his rugged good looks.

The rhythm of his cast mirrors his personality; strong, slow, and steady. The trees along the shore bare of branches on one side. The harsh winter wind making one side of the trunks smooth, softer. I walked across the yard and joined him on the dock. Hearing my approach, he turned his face towards me and smiled. There was something in eyes that I hadn't seen before, love. I smiled back.

These past ten days, sheltered in place due to a pandemic, were some of the best days of my life: magical really. I hope you found a bit of pandemic magic too!

“What can I do to help?” I cried. Nothing, they said. Just stay inside. We must flatten the curve, then quash it, too. It won't help at all if you should move.

So here I sit, day after day. And learn about genomes and roles that they play in mutations and makeup of virus cells. This is scary stuff, that I can tell.

Too many deaths, each morning’s count brings me much grief as the numbers mount. Those points on the graphs can’t hide the sorrow as America wonders what will happen tomorrow.

Doctors and nurses receive strong ovations. You are the new heroes of this wounded nation. Scientists, virologists, epidemiologists, as well. You have answered the call, and our hearts swell.

How do we emerge when the battle is won? Are we a better people for uniting as one? It’s important we learn from this tragic year. That we write our future with love and not fear.
Our mothers were sisters, born 11 years apart, into a family of three boys. Both are dead now, but my cousins and I stay close. In normal times we travel together and visit on holidays. We text more now.

About a week into the pandemic, cousin number two texted a picture of our Nana’s applesauce cake with her original handwritten recipe leaning against it.

“It’s so good,” she texted. “It’s unbelievable.”

“I’m going to make it,” I proclaimed. We had all heard about how good Nana’s applesauce cake was and that it didn’t have “any eggs” (!). I printed out the grainy picture from my phone and made it a few days later.

I sent the cousins a picture of my cake, a knife split in the middle revealed a gooey center.

“It’s a little undone in the middle. Perhaps an 8 inch pan rather than a loaf, or maybe a longer cook time,” I suggested. “But still DELICIOUS!!!!!”

Characteristically, the old recipe didn’t specify pan size or oven temperature.

“Bake in a moderate oven for three quarters of an hour,” Nana wrote.

A few days later, my phone beeped. Cousin number three’s version of Nana’s cake made an appearance.

“Such an aroma it has, and so moist!” her text read below the picture.

Our husbands loved the cake. They never knew our Nana, yet her delicious applesauce cake provided comforting solidarity to all of us. Nana would have been pleased.

One afternoon, before it was suggested that perhaps we should all wear a mask, I headed out to grab a burger from McDonald’s and stop in the 7-11. It was just like a regular day at both places…packed, people close together not at all observing the six feet of separation we’re suppose to follow. I’ve taken distancing quite seriously from day one; there was no way I would set foot in either establishment. On to the market I went. People with and without masks seemed like they were in zombie mode, no life in their eyes, moving rather haphazardly in part because we were avoiding being near one another though others just seemed as if they were in a daze. Folks without masks didn’t seem to give a damn about physical distancing, so when I sternly told the man behind me in line to step back and give me my space, my adrenaline was rushing! Was it fear, frustration, anger? Though it wasn’t clear to me what emotion had taken hold, it was clear that when I spoke, it wasn’t a request, it was a demand.

Once home, as I walked from my car to the front door enjoying spring all around me it dawned on me – in the season when nature is springing back to life, it is tragically sad that so many people are losing theirs. If six feet of separation might spare my life and the lives of others, I’ll continue to keep my distance.

While I vacillate between stretches of calm and momentary bursts of panic, it took an earthquake in Salt Lake City, on top of a global pandemic to wake me up.

Three days into sheltering in place, a 5.7 magnitude earthquake rumbled through our city.
For me, it was a huge lesson: I can’t predict what’s going to happen today, tomorrow or a month from now. With aftershocks fresh in my mind, I can’t predict what’s going to happen in five minutes.

I’m trying to feel comfortable with the unknown, not easy for someone who likes to plan. A benign cough sends my mind into overdrive wondering if this is “it.” All I can do is be in the moment and remember to breathe.

Just like the earthquake shook me to my core, the pandemic has cracked me open, bringing into sharp focus of what’s truly important. Systemically cancelling everything on my calendar has been liberating, creating space for self-reflection. There’s no FOMO (fear of missing out) because nothing is going on. While alone time feeds my soul, I’ve wanted to connect with pretty much everyone I’ve ever known. Zoom, foreign to me a few months ago, has become routine. I cry at collaborative YouTube videos and my husband and I are binging on Netflix and taking a lot of walks. I listen to the birds.

At a time when our very foundation is shifting and tremors of fear well up inside, all I can do is be in the moment. And remember to breathe.

**8 Ways Grandchildren Touch You, Except When They Can’t**

*Cora Liederbach*

1. Your stomach flutters as you cradle a baby small enough to fit into a Christmas stocking. Soon, his warm heft sinks into your arms.

2. He glides on his belly like an alligator. You wonder, Will he crawl? until he two-steps around you on the couch.

3. You’re staggered when the toddler throws back his head laughing, unprompted, till he can’t stop.

4. You roll the ball to the baby, who scoots so close to you he drops it right in your lap. You think, Can’t time just stop?

5. A large forehead presses into yours — so hard it almost hurts — as warm eyes, peering from beneath, enchant you.

6. You wait out a tantrum over a finger-smudged iPad, then say, Can you take a deep breath? Do you want to hold onto the bad feeling … or let it go, and play?

7. The boys bicker over dinosaurs, then burst into giggles and tumble, wrestling, over the back of the couch. Your heart balloons.

8. Covid-19 pauses the world. The boys, just half a day away, may as well be on Pluto. And though FaceTime brings you their Knock-Knock jokes and shows you their Iron Giant and birthday cake and yellow blackbelt karate moves, it’s not the same as arms wrapping round your thighs or wet, drippy-nose kisses missing your lips — especially when all goes dark as a red palm covers the phone or they stash it in a box because it’s so hilarious.

**Tender Tinder**

*Janet Lombardi*

Conversation tails the wag of then. Like rummaging through tea leaves, his fingertips, weary of steering clear, forage my cheekbones. I’m stone. Man I love just looking for a tender zone. Yet my face wrenches free, slow-motion twist, arms a V. A touch in quarantine. Fear rears and feeds that resistance.


Disgust stares back and reeks the salt air. My deke dodges the glare like a master looking for blind. Palms so sweet, shoot up high, no sign of weapons sir. He turns, palm fronds on the terrace wave like wands.

Tide ebbs and cleans the sand. a Dios mío, a grain of forgiveness.
Blister blare declares my fear too toxic to understand. Too mustard gas for the nostrils! Nothing twenty seconds of hand washing can’t fulfill as oxygen regenerates, stares down facts, and venerates the ask. How touch so tender can torch the last good face mask.

Alright, I confess, we held hands.

Quietly, we traversed mile after mile.

Life began ‘projecting’ scenes. Before my eyes, a rolling film played itself —slides, before my time, flashed in rapid succession.

I looked deeply into many faces —there were horrific times —devastation —no words ‘fit’ to diagram for they ran on, and on, and on.

No sentence structure could piece together paragraphs, chapters of inhumanity, natural disasters, chaos.

Yet, Life nudged my hand, and I picked up a pen, this pen.

But, I’m getting ahead of myself. Life stepped with me over mountain tops dazzled with pristine snow. We skipped through valleys with colorful wild flowers stopping their sway to stare.

Life took me to the water’s edge and, letting go of my hand, united me with another—Death.

I gasped, I cried. I knew this ‘sting.’ I dropped to my knees.

Death seemed to hold me, yes, almost lovingly. Death stayed at my side and wept with me as the tide rolled itself in.
I did not move~~~

Sand slipped its way alongside my body wrapping me like a blanket—it was so difficult to be comforted.

The film I had been watching…
I whispered, ‘cut’

What was before me was NOW.
How long I was held on this shore
I know not.
The tide was out.

Death brought me back to Life.
The three of us rose.

I’m ‘inside’ again
with this pen and paper.

Though at a “loss for words,”
I continue creating
because the picture now playing IS my Life

and I’m living with so ‘many’
in these unknown times.

I still know how to laugh.
I embrace the depth of my tears.
Fear is a friend, anger causes me to reach out more and more.

I touch, and am touched, even from a distance.

Life is in ‘these’ words.
Death will come and the ink spilling from this pen will dry.

NOW…I live
along side you
and, among the many who have become new stars in the canopy overhead.

---

**Passover**

Joyce Mettelman

Begins Friday evening March 30, so I start to think about that word and its meaning, its origin and even wonder why that dark angel didn’t pass over this house, this country we built together, this fortress of understanding we worked so hard to achieve.

You’re gone, and with you all those Passovers-----the childhood memories that climbed to the attic, retrieved the holiday dishes, stole the napkin-draped matzo waited hungrily for the long service to end, tasted the haroses, the wine, the bitter greens, witnessed the full wine glass and the open door, sang the final song.

You were the one who knew all the words, Hebrew and English, the one who sang the songs on key, who held that history in his bones.

You’ve gone, taken Passover with you., it’s just a another day, one more to pass over.

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**Photos of the Beach**

Margaret Dubay Mikus

Somewhere a beach is bordered by shining water, sailboat in the distance and bubblegum pink flowers wildly grow around a tropical porch, finally noticed

The world is ending as we knew it and we are going to re-create a new one as is always true, but usually less drastically, less brusquely

What we keep, what we toss—the baby with the bath water?

continued
—is again and always up to us
You may say, I am not powerful

I have nothing to do with all this
I did not create this chaos or a novel virus
And that is true and not true
for within each of us is the power to imagine

Each of us can start within and begin
to radiate out into the world you live in
something that matters, heal what
drags down, even one small thing

all adds up to something. Lift up all the boats
Let the truth be revealed we said
and it is. Whether we can bear it or not
whether we can hear it or not.

In Praise Of

Janice Davis Miller

I love opening my eyes to first light,
The feel of cold wood on my bare feet
As I touch down.
The Sun sifting through the white, transparent curtain,
Touching the pink blossom of Christmas
(or is it Easter) cactus.
The scent of strong, black coffee
As I scuff into the kitchen and grab
My old, stained mug
With the drawing of two chairs meeting
The sleepy smile of my Lover
As he stumbles past me to his slippers.
I love to look out at the Bay,
The hot cup in my hand
As I slide the door open and slip
Out Into the day
Birds communing across the trees,
Hawks gliding above the Harbor.
No sailboats at the moorings yet
Just the small work boats of
Clammers, their long rakes gathering
The button clams we will have
For our candlelight supper
As the world reels from the pandemic,
I pray not to be the elder that is chosen
To Die....

Silent Killer

Pamela Mones

It came with the stealth of a lion.
The silence of night.
The force of an angry god.
No knock.
No letter.
No invitation.
No warning.
Dressed with a splash of red,
A halo of iridescent green,
A cluster of spikes adorning its surface.
The graphic of a warrior,
Drawn by an artist.
Splendid in its round shape,
Bright colors,
Spiky texture.
A visual so real,
Yet surreal.
Its deadliness cloaked in a spectacular visual.
An image only a gifted artist could render.

This foreigner,
Born in a non-warring country,
Now a greater threat to mankind than a terrorist bomb.
A demon that has shocked us into bitter awareness that
we are vulnerable.
A foe that attacks without sorrow,
Guilt,
Empathy,
Drifting from city to city,
Country to country,
Leaving a path of destruction,
And panic.
Blind-siding people.
Imprisoning us in our homes.
Separating us from loved ones.
Destroying our economy.
Faith and hope severely tested.

Go away, you silent killer!
Go away, Covid-19.
You will not annihilate us.
We will eliminate you.
We are fighters.
Go away you unwelcome warrior!
Hope Comes in Small Twinsets

Vicki Noll

New parents in India named their twins for the pandemic: Corona and Covid.

The reaction on social media is mixed, bouncing from indignant outrage to hysterical amusement. Originally, I wasn’t a fan, but I’m rethinking: did they offer us a way to feel empowered at a time when we are fairly powerless? A way to inspire hope when we are on the precipice of hopelessness?

So, should we thank the parents in India who gave us a Mark Twain intermission in the midst of a Stephen King marathon? Should we think of the twins as symbols of hope? And shouldn’t we embrace all hope offered during these days when embracing is considered reckless endangerment?

Even though it isn’t mine to give, I forgive them for the years of teasing their children will almost inevitably receive in school, and the embarrassment they will feel every time they make a new acquaintance.

I forgive them this because for this one brief news cycle amid the terrifying numbers and the blaming rhetoric and the changing face of our enemy, they have given us a smile, a new thing to discuss during our Zoom coffee chats with friends, and a booster shot to protect our senses of humor from becoming a statistic.

I imagine Covid and Corona reading this as adults and joining with me to finally forgive their parents, understanding that their names offered courage and some hope-filled comic relief to a world in desperate need.

Just Give Me the Facts

Cathleen O’Connor

When I was a kid, there was a television show called Dragnet. At some point in each episode, the police detective would say, “All we want are the facts, ma’am.” A variant of this became a catchphrase so popular that the actor (Jack Webb) who portrayed Sgt. Joe Friday made it the title of his autobiography.

I’m a fan of facts. Not everyone is. To me, knowing the facts, whether good or bad, brings clarity to what might otherwise be a confusing and scary situation. Once I have the facts, then I can formulate an action plan. Facts, for me, focus my thinking and my energy for greatest effect. Life is filled with ambiguities. A set of good facts cuts through the morass and provides direction.

Studies show that facts don’t change people’s opinions or even what they believe. We are masterful creatures - able to create the reality that most suits our world view, even if the facts tell us different. One of my favorite quotes is by English crime writer and poet, Dorothy L. Sayers, who said “Facts are like cows. If you look them in the face long enough, they run away.”

I cope with the pandemic by writing. I write what I’m feeling. I write my fears. I write my anxieties and worries. I write and write. I use my facts to find an anchor of clarity for myself and I build on that. For me, that brings relief and even peace.
Defying Fear by Choosing Peace

Tonia Pinheiro

My constant reminder: I have free will and can choose to join the fear vibration, or not. My mind will try to convince me that fear, dread, worry (about what might happen) is the only thing to feel... but it’s not, if I focus on my heart and trust my intuition.

This “mastery” of choice is demonstrated when I hear or read the words being broadcast and do not allow those words to have any meaning for me personally. I simply assess its relevance to me, take whatever precautions I decide I need, and move my thoughts and feelings on to where I prefer to be in that moment. Usually a state of emotional stillness or peace.

The most difficult but necessary task is to keep pulling myself back to “what is” in the present moment. “I do have enough food and soap and toilet paper now and trust if I run out I can get more in that moment.” Any consequences or benefits of staying at home, or being a first responder or essential service provider, will appear when or if they do, regardless of my emotional state now. In the meantime, how I perceive or think about what I allow in the moment I’m in, is all I have control over.

Speculating or worrying about the future is joining the fear vibration and adds to it. Maintaining a core of peace in the midst of the fear is what we are all called to do right now. And we are legions!

So far, only three residents have succumbed to this dreaded virus. Thanks to strict adherence to all guidelines, no one is allowed in the building except necessary staff. Thanks to that, very few of Seabury’s employees have been tested positive and put in immediate isolation.

We are encouraged to take solitary walks outside—not in pairs except for people who share apartments. We are encouraged to wear masks outside and in the halls and to stay at least 6’ apart. All outside doors are locked to incoming visitors. We are not allowed visitors on the grounds unless they obey the 6’ rule and do not wander along the paths. We can walk dogs but the same outdoor rules apply.

It is inevitable that more people in assisted living, skilled nursing, or mental health support will test positive and die, but independent living and assisted living residents may not socialize in anyway. In mental health support, they may use their common areas, but there again, meals are sparse. No visitors are admitted anywhere.

Unoccupied cottages have been set up as isolation areas until test results come in. After that, if someone tests positive, they are either treated here, or transferred to a nearby hospital to be treated.

All common spaces are locked—the community room, dining room and Bistro, library, greenhouse, game room, fitness center, pool.... Only essential areas remain open—In-house rehab and the clinic. Most of the staff work from home. We clean for ourselves.

Seabury has done more than enough to kill the virus before it kills us. So far this is the 4th week of isolation. For myself and other residents who heeded the advice of
Defeating COVID-19 Together

Evelyn Crawford Rosser & Felecia Theune

The intruder creeps in, like a thief in the night
Undetected unless symptoms come to light

Dry cough and aches
Bluish lips and face
Shortness of breath
Pains in the chest

Nearly every nation invaded by coronavirus
Princes and paupers reduced to same status

Some survive.
Some die.
Some alone.
Some at home.

Face-to-face interaction gives way
To social distance and shelter in place

Some deny.
Some cry.
Some stray.
Some pray.

Thank you, grazie, gracious, merci
For responding courageously

Doctors and nurses
Grocery store workers
City bus drivers
Essential providers

Unarmed soldiers for humanity
Left vulnerable by lack of PPE

Some infected.
Some dejected.
Some hope.
Some cope.

Our heroes need us to be heroes too
Defeating COVID-19 depends on what WE do
Give generously
Love selflessly
Unplug physically
Connect virtually

Delay death for some other day
Choose to save a life today

Letter to Covid-19

Laura Rutland

(after E. E. Lampman’s “Letter to a Tardigrade”)

If you have a message
keep it to yourself. Let the lake speak
with a flash of sun and water.

Let the IHOP serve me eggs that shout
through swimming yellow, while hash browns hide
on the edge of the plate to escape the eggs’ runny
embrace.

Let the choir process, a parade of song both graceful
and awkward. Let me lumber among them
sing or croak, in purple robe and white surplice.

Let rows of desks be filled again,
come fall. Let them not be
empty placeholders made of metal and plastic.

continued
I go for a walk when the sun is shining
feeling the fear of those who are sick
and will be sicker.
I look for something to hold onto
while the world reels
then unreels.

Passing the neighbor’s house I hear flapping in their tall oak.
There in the morning light, of all things, a prayer flag caught tight in the branches,
its colors streaming down to me.

“The right place for prayer flags”, someone told me,
“is around the frame of the doorway.”
Red, blue, yellow, white and green
the elements of air, fire, water, earth.

My head tells me it’s just a dead balloon,
escaped from a long ago birthday party
but my heart says

it is a door,
an entrance,
a place to find peace.

I grab those shreds, and hold on tight.

Looking for Peace During the Pandemic

Susan Schefflein

We have lived through hard times before

Linda Leedy Schneider, LMSW

We are doing well. Having groceries delivered,
zooming with family which sadly makes me miss them more.
This time takes me back to days spent with a new baby,
so centered and strangely calm in the dailiness of it all.
21 meals a week is no joke. I dug up my cuisinart
abandoned in the basement for 11 years.
and the mixer is getting a workout.
I am remembering I always loved to cook.
I believe in living in the present moment and that helps. Right now the TV hums
in the background, my husband murmurs
in his morning sleep, the sun shines,
seeds sprout safe in their incubators,
the air is redolent with roasted sweet potatoes
and I love living in my favorite blue bathrobe.
Strangely enough it was my Mother’s,
and she died 10 years ago. I think
I wear it because it is soft.
Can’t seem to throw it away...yet!
I wear my Grandmother Claire’s necklace.
Claire died at 24 in the pandemic of 1918.
My Mother was four and she said,
“They stacked bodies in the street.
Mamma wore her blue dress.”
I snorkel to the offshore buoy where the turtles congregate, called Honu in Hawai’ian, and select one to follow. While hovering on the undulating surface of the ocean, I mimic its unhurried pace by slowing down my breath and mirroring its relaxed liquid motion. I rotate my hands in small circles to stay afloat as I imitate the rhythm of its flippers, while it leisurely forages tiny plants clinging to the submerged lava rocks. When it moves to the left, I slowly float to the left following the lead of a dance partner. I stalk the wild Honu and stay locked on it until it disappears among the rocks or surfaces for air. Unhurriedly, I glide around to find another partner to continue the dance until I tire and swim slowly back to shore.

Later, when I think of the pandemic and worry that it might overwhelm me, a 72-year old, immune-compromised woman, I search for an image to help me cope. I think about Honu on its annual several thousand-mile migration into danger and the unknown. Recalling the sensation of dancing with Honu I close my eyes, slow down my breathing, and let my body remember weightlessly floating on the shimmering surface of the water. With each breath Honu’s spirit connects me to the wild part of myself, energizing my own instinctual strength and resilience to meet these challenging and uncertain times. It doesn’t take the fear away, it just enables and empowers me to swim with it.

My friend Margaret gave me a gorgeous orchid with striped magenta flowers. How festive and joyous! In January, when all the blossoms fell off, I moved the pot with only stem and leaves to a corner, assuming her blooming days were done.

Hilda, a friend who knows plants, said, “Keep watering it once a week.” When I remembered, I would put two ice cubes on the soil, for slow release of water. My poor orchid sat exiled in the corner.

Now we, too, are exiled in our homes. We can, however, take walks. Around the corner, I see a path lined with small flags from all around the world. They wave in the breeze, reminding me of my fifth grade trip to the United Nations. The guide showed us the Meditation Room, with beige sofas and low lights.

She said that diplomats came to here to think when they had big decisions to make, really big decisions about war and peace. As she led us from the room, I lingered a moment, listening to the silence of that safe space.

These days, we have all grown tired of our safe spaces. Home can feel like a prison with the walls closing in. We want to break out and run down the street, our arms flapping like wings. We want to shout to the universe, “We're still here!”

This morning, a striped magenta orchid bursts into bloom. Nature, often cruel and devastating, offers us hope at just the right time.
Sunlight dances on the neighbor’s pond.
The weeping cherry blooms, stories tall.
Two blue jays and a cardinal inspect the lawn.
Maple buds sprinkle rubies in the flower beds.
Daffodils turn their trusting faces toward the light.

Waking up in my own bed not sequestered in a foreign land, I savor the first sip of coffee, dark and rich like the moist hillside in my backyard where I watch dozens of robins plucking worms from the warming earth. We breakfast together, yet alone, my husband and I, with the robins, two of whom weave a nest atop the dogwood wreath at our front door building upon previous years of nesting materials. We like to believe the same pair returns yearly. Outdoors, hope is coming alive despite the alarming spread of a virulent virus. The green leaves of the daffodils planted along our rock wall are stretching their necks to greet the gift of sunshine and lengthening days. A still sleepy bear ambles down across our property, probably after the bird seeded feeders we have brought in after a long winter. As we savor these quieted days lifted by nature, the fruit of the vine takes the edge off the daily news. We enjoy a good cabernet with dinner then nestle in our den to watch old carefree movies. After a hibernating sleep, we will feast once again with the robins tomorrow morning.