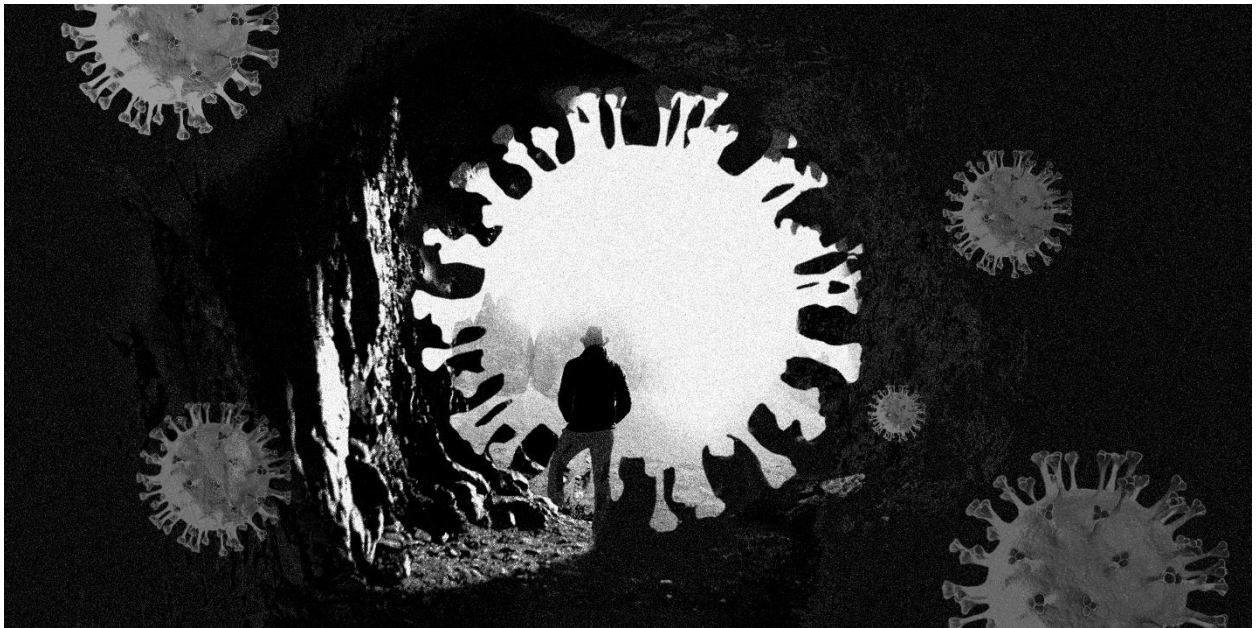


The Pandemic Project

Volume 4



SUNY Erie
Spring 2022

Volume 4 of *The Pandemic Project* showcases creative work from the Spring '22 semester, which marked the end of the indoor mask mandate on March 7. The pieces navigate a new normal while offering hope for a brighter tomorrow as some encompass war in the Ukraine. A student writes, "...this deadly virus has never been any weaker./Night has passed, now day is finally here." Another asks, "Is winter ending or is it false spring?" One student reflects, "I feel the anxious energy in the air clear out/We all are healing, slowly."

The Pandemic Project evolved in Spring 2020 when the annual Spring Arts Festival was cancelled due to COVID-19. Knowing that our students would not be able to recite their work live on the stage, we wanted to create a space to commemorate their creative efforts. It was our hope to share their voices and talent by recording their challenges and the ways in which they came to terms with the pandemic in this collection.

Special thanks to Humanities Professor Michelle Michael-Lippens for suggesting we find a virtual venue for this project. She has been a continual source of support for the arts throughout her tenure at SUNY Erie, and we would like to congratulate her on her retirement. We would also like to thank Advanced Studies teacher Kevin Edward at Alden Senior High School for encouraging his students to submit their work.

Thank you to librarian Matthew Best for his interest in *The Pandemic Project* and ensuring it found a home in the SUNY Erie Library Archives.

Edited by

Professor Jennifer Campbell

Associate Professor Lisa Wiley Moslow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Anonymous, <i>No More Disappointment</i>	55
Babula, Caleb, <i>The Green Dot</i>	19
Ballistrea, Anthony, <i>Baseball or Bust</i>	34
Cabral, Edna I., <i>MY MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PANDEMIC</i>	18
Calandra, Erika, <i>Zoom Therapy, The Struggle is Real</i>	42
Campbell, Jennifer, <i>The Art of the Detail</i>	71
Cedano, Alejandra, <i>Naked and Afraid</i>	8
Charnock, Norman J. IV, <i>I Wish in the Home of Your Heart</i>	50
<i>Monopoly</i>	6
EN 140 class, <i>April Duplex</i>	17
Farrell, James, <i>Light at the End</i>	52
Ferro, Skylar, <i>Another Day, Another Dollar</i>	37
Fromwiller, Kathleen, <i>The Dandelion</i>	24
Gray-Hailey, Della, <i>Just Me</i>	49
Guragai, Bishal, <i>Black Dagger</i>	28
<i>Reminiscing About You</i>	27
Harris, Bronwen, <i>Pandemic</i>	54
Hillman, Lexie, <i>The Healing</i>	72
Hoerner, Caleigh, <i>Long, Tiring Shift</i>	58
Horst, Jessica, <i>Infected with Peace</i>	62
Kelly, Amelia, <i>The Walls Are Falling Down</i>	63
Kerchenski, Mathew, <i>Covid Champions</i>	33
Kurdi, Farah, <i>I Have a Dream Too!</i>	10
Lardill, Jalen, <i>An Elephant in The Night</i>	14
<i>Pick Six</i>	9
Leslie, Blake, <i>My Descent Toward Alienation</i>	39
Majeed, Maryam, <i>Atlanta</i>	12
<i>Country of Your Heart</i>	13
Marino, Mia, <i>The Story of a Weekend</i>	45
Mathews, Anthony, <i>The Final Goodbye</i>	68
<i>Moving On</i>	51
<i>The Surviving City</i>	73
<i>Ukrainian Sunflowers</i>	69
Mazur, Maddie, <i>DC</i>	11
Miller, Brooke, <i>School Bus</i>	7
Monin, Eric, <i>Unintended Opportunist</i>	66
Moslow, Lisa Wiley, <i>The Bell in the Corner</i>	26
Owens, Madison, <i>Ignorance Isn't Always Bliss</i>	21
Peay, Amir, <i>Bird's Eye View</i>	25
Pruetz, Andrew, <i>By the Apple Tree</i>	53
Richter, Allison, <i>A Hit in the Dark</i>	46
Riddoch, Grant, <i>Pandemic Time</i>	60

Skimmer, Sydney, <i>The New Normal</i>	61
Trometer, Kenneth, <i>Getting through the Darkness</i>	16
Tryka, Rayahna, <i>When Will It End?</i>	64
Uhrich, Abigail, <i>Divided</i>	65
Wilcox, John, <i>Sunflowers of Chernobyl</i>	70
<i>To All the Poems</i>	74
Wilkinson, Reese, <i>The COVID Nightmare</i>	67
Wils, Rebecca, <i>Two Weeks to Slow the Spread</i>	59
Wozniak, Hanna, <i>The Pre-Pandemic</i>	30
<i>Year 2020</i>	29
Zenki, Karar, <i>The Corona Voyage</i>	57

These pages are dedicated to SUNY Erie Humanities Professor:

Michelle Michael-Lippens

whose motto is always “The show must go on!”

We extend deep gratitude for her tireless devotion and support of the arts and of SUNY Erie’s students, faculty, and staff.

Thank you, Michelle for bringing the Spring Arts play *Shakespeare’s Got Talent* and the annual student poetry/prose reading back to the stage this May!

Monopoly

Norman J. Charnock IV

Old and tucked away
collecting dust waiting to be played.
That old box was only brought out
once in a while but was well used.

It's beaten and battered after
years of use, but no one will mention it.
This is a dreaded game that everyone knows
but no one wants to play for days upon end.

Cardboard box, the iconic top-hatted man,
welcoming us to play our day away.
The colorful paper money, red and green houses,
and the properties waiting for new ownership.

But be aware players:
This game will break the closest of bonds.
Cutthroat business, tense auctions, and bankruptcy
may be the end of your friendship.

School Bus

Brooke Miller

Metal rectangle they don't buckle in for trips.
Bright yellow - big red stop sign - safety implied.

We've had a complicated relationship,
interlaced with life since my daughter turned 5.

Important to us - as education is,
I am thankful for the service you provide.

My little girl goes away - I lose my grip.
Sad-eyed betrayal as she boards, I wave goodbye.

Searching twelve windows to blow a parting kiss.
Torn from each other - don't let her see me cry.

Fast forward to the year Covid exists.
Home school no bus - I can keep her inside.

Selfish I know, I love asynchronous.
Grow closer but then pandemic subsides.

On the street hazard lights - hear your brakes hiss.
6:50 "love you" - a hug - she runs outside.

Five days a week you come, her I always miss.
Most of eight years, upon you we have relied.

As she grows, I know I'll come to reminisce.
No more bus for her soon, she'll have her own ride.

Naked and Afraid

Alejandra Cedano

It's a new normal.
My mask fell off at Walmart
And I froze in shame
I suddenly felt naked
like I had just flashed the place.

Pick Six

Jalen Lardill

— Sonnet Challenge runner-up, Professor Moslow's EN 101

Will this be my last time under these lights?
The pressure is up, the crowd is roaring
A mistake, you'll be in someone's highlights
Loved when I stopped the offense from scoring

Huddled up with a group I'd call brothers
Anxious to play the last down of the game
Trash-talking didn't faze me like some others
What happens next will only lead to my fame

I knew their plays, I covered the shallows
The blood, sweat, and tears shed throughout the night
My tights' knee the same color as aloe
Wet, musty, discolored jerseys proved fight

Pass this way it is an interception
The news headlines called it an abreption

I Have a Dream Too!

Farah Kurdi

I have a dream that one day this nation will respect each other, love each other, and stand as one!

I have a dream that one day all nations will unite!

I have a dream that one day everyone will be able to achieve their dreams and not let their race, gender, or age define them!

I have a dream that one day racism will stop! Coronavirus will stop! And masks will be gone forever!

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day all families will be united.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day we don't have to worry about global warming.

This is my hope and faith. With this faith, we will be able to love, unite, honor each other no matter our race, gender, or age.

This will be the day when we will be happy and stress-free.

DC

Maddie Mazur

Virginia is for lovers, that's the motto of the state.
How ironic? For a state with a capitol filled with hate.
I've made the metro journey from Fairfax
to DC many a time.
So many different people on each and every line.
This hill will be my home,
this *swamp* will be my home.
It could be my home, I can fix it.
A capitol divided by an invisible line,
a crack driven deeper by an illness and a mask.
One nation indivisible, I can make it so.
I will make it so.

Atlanta

Maryam Majeed

Waiting at the bench of this big grocery store
This why I get bored all the time when I go
With my mom, oh all these families going to get
Food at the same time, customers waiting in lines
My eyes checking them around like a little
Mouse scared of strangers that passed the seat
Looking at the cashier how she scans the items
Gives people a smile instead of just looking a weird
Creepy way maybe they don't give her enough
Money here. Mom, she comes with a full cart

Country of Your Heart

—after Robley Wilson
Maryam Majeed

I wish in the country of your heart
you would let me be the army
where I will fight for you during bad
times. I imagine your jacket
that warms you during snowstorms. I
wish to be your child that sits and
talks to you around a bonfire while camping.

An Elephant in The Night

Jalen Lardill

The bars on Chippewa were packed and filled. In this bar, there were close to a dozen people. At this time that was how many people the bouncers were letting inside as the streets filled with drunken campaigners. Waves of laughter, country music, and heat traveled through the air. The broad-minded man and the lady with him stood at the bar waiting to be served. It was very hot being in a bar wearing masks.

"What should we drink?" the lady asked. She had taken off her mask and put it inside her purse.

"It's pretty hot," the man said. "Let's drink beer."

The man waved the bartender down as they made eye contact.

"Two Corona Lights," the man ordered to drink.

"Cash or credit?" a woman asked from behind the counter.

"Cash, keep the change for your tip."

The woman sat two glasses of beer on the counter in front of them. She proceeded to place two coasters under the drinks as she surveyed the two. The man was well dressed in a nice blue polo shirt. The lady, equally dressed as nice, was wearing red lipstick. Could they be on a date? The lady was looking off at the night sky. The stars were bright and sparkling.

"That looks like a tiny elephant," she said.

"What does?" the man finished his beer.

"The stars, they form a tiny elephant."

"Not really, I see more of a horse-like animal if anything," the man said. "You have to look at it from all perspectives and angles, and that'll help you decide what's the best choice." The lady stared off at the sign on the wall. 'No Mask, No Entry.' The man noticed her reading the poster.

"Is that the actual rules or is that put up for decoration?" the lady asked.

"The rules, for safety, it is what is best for everyone to help prevent getting sick," the man said.

"I don't know," the lady said. "It's all fake, it's all a big government scheme. This virus isn't real. The government wants to track us and make us pay more taxes."

"Oh, stop being selfish and clueless. People keep dying from this virus. It's bad enough having most businesses shut down. Being tolerant and obeying rules so that it becomes the social norm will help everyone get through this."

"Either way I'm not getting it," the lady said.

"Oh, cut it out. Don't be like that."

"There's no real research. It was made this year. I'm not doing that to my body," she said.

"Let's just enjoy our time. Everything will be okay. Everything would be more fine if life returned to normal. If everyone did it we all would just be fine."

The lady rolled her eyes, turning away from him.

"Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

More and more people began to pile inside the bar.

"The beer's cold and going down easy," the man said.

"Corona's aren't bad at all," the lady said.

"It's really quick and painless, Phyllis," the man said. "It's not dangerous at all."

The lady stared back at the poster on the wall.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, Phyllis. It's really not anything. It's just to help produce and develop immunity."

The lady stood in silence.

"I'll even go with you and stand by your side the entire time. It'll take two seconds, and then you'll be perfectly fine.

"There's no research of what will happen to me next."

"You'll be fine afterwards. Just like you were before."

"What makes you so sure? Do you really believe everything the government wants us to do? You liberals will do anything."

The man looked down at the dirty floor and read the words 'Social Distance 6ft.'

"Think about it; it's what's best. No social distancing, no mask. Everyone will all be happy!"

"And everything will eventually turn back to normal?" said the lady.

"Yes, I promise. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the lady. "And afterwards many of them got really sick."

"It's called side effects. It will only last three days," the man said, "I'm totally fine and alive. If you don't want to, you don't have to. No one is going to force you to get it."

"But do you want me to get it?"

"I think it's perfectly safe. It's the best thing to do right now. It will help you to prevent catching the virus, and it will help the world return to normal."

"And if I do it you'll be happy, and I don't have to wear a mask again?"

"Yes, my love, it is what is best."

"Fine. If this will make us happy again, fine."

Getting through the Darkness

Kenneth Trometer

Over two years of darkness
We've all undergone grave changes.
Like wearing masks that hide our tenderness,
And facing periods of isolation in our dens.

Despite these abrupt changes
Time didn't stop, so neither did we.
We adapted within this new environment
Through use of technology, like the internet.

Proceeding the two-year anniversary
Of this pandemic in Western New York,
The light is starting to outshine the darkness.
This disease seems it's on its final stand.

The world is no longer lonely,
Masks have mostly dissipated,
And this deadly virus has never been any weaker.
Night has passed, now day is finally here.

April Duplex

EN 140 collectively written poem April 7, 2022

Will we live together or kill each other?
As the rain drops, clouds begin to cry.

As the rain drops, I begin to cry.
Masks are off, breathe in the fresh spring air.

Masks stay off, worms breathe in the fresh spring air.
Some fear to gather; others don't care.

Some want to gather; others don't care.
All surrounded by death and disease.

All surrounded by dark death and disease.
Is winter ending or is it false spring?

Is winter ending or is it false spring?
Sunshine is here, let's all get along.

Sunshine is here, let's all get along.
Will we live together? Or kill each other?

MY MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PANDEMIC

Edna I. Cabral

AS IF DEALING WITH DEPRESSION
AND ANXIETY WASN'T ENOUGH
HERE CAME A BIGGER CHALLENGE
TO MAKE MY MENTAL HEALTH WORSE

A PANDEMIC OUT OF SO MANY THINGS
CAME UNWELCOMED TO IMPOSE
AND TO TRIGGER ABOVE ALL
MY FEELINGS OF DISTRUST

DISTRUST OF MY RAISING MIND
AS I BATTLE WITH THIS DISEASE
OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY
THAT DOESN'T LET ME BE

BUT THEN I HAVE TO WONDER
IF, FOR ME, THIS IS A BAD THING
AS ONLY A SOUL WITH THE SAME STRUGGLES
WOULD CERTAINLY KNOW WHAT I MEAN

THE MASKS!!! THEY CAN CERTAINLY HELP ME
HIDE MY FACE FROM THE CROWD
THAT WAY, THEY WON'T SEE
WHEN MY FACE TURNS RED AND DOWN

The Green Dot

Caleb Babula

My wife and I have reached Times Square, the location in which we will draw from a lottery machine to see if we get the COVID vaccine or not. You are eligible to get the vaccine if your slip has a green dot, you then get to stay in the safety bubble. If not, you are thrown into what's left of society on the outside. Everything has fallen apart since the start of the pandemic; I have witnessed the deaths of my mother Amy and my father Chris in just the past month. After learning that the first of 5 lotteries would be held to get the vaccine, we ran to the car and drove here as quickly as possible. All around I see scared and helpless people trying to lead their families to safety, I only care about me and my wife anymore. All morals and acts of kindness have been stripped from society and the earth itself has not been the same. Nobody communicates or talks, people rarely leave their houses and worst of all the murder rates have skyrocketed in the past 3 months. All of this has led to the vaccine, trying to bring at least some of society back to its normal ways and restoring humanity as we know it.

Mayor Hightower and Doctor Millsap have entered Time Square and can be seen on a stage high and above the looming crowds. All of a sudden a voice appears over the loudspeakers and everyone silences along with myself. The muffled and murmuring crowd awaits the message to be delivered by the mayor. I can feel my heart pounding out of my chest and cold beads of sweat rolling down my forehead, the suspense is immense and unbearable. "Hello everybody, welcome to the very first COVID-19 vaccine lottery," says Mayor Hightower. "I know you are all very anxious and confused on what is going on and how the lottery will work but allow me to explain. We have allowed 5,000 of you to enter Time Square today in the hopes you pull a green slip out of the lottery machine that allows you to get one of the very limited supply of vaccines. 500 will be given out, 4,500 of you will be thrown back into the mess of a society on the outside," says Mayor Hightower. I can feel my wife's hand trembling in mine and can feel her tears landing on my shoulder.

"Don't worry honey, everything will work out just fine. We have my Irish Luck on our side." She offers a small grin and lets out a small giggle. Laughs and smiles are rare and unseen ever since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, something I dearly miss from the old society before this catastrophe. I look into my bag to grab a snack and find that a man is reaching his hand out and rips a sandwich out of my bag and runs. I chase after the thief through the crowded New York City streets, attempting to fetch some of the little food we have left. Suddenly someone sticks their foot out and trips the thief, allowing me to catch up and take my sandwich back. "Why would you steal my sandwich and run off," I said without truly giving the question any thought. "Look at me," the man says. "I am starving and am not the man I once was. I am basically skin and bones, I try to feed myself however I must." I gave the man a stern look and walked away towards the direction of my wife. After all, kindness was dead, and everyone had to look out for themselves.

Squirming through the crowd of thousands, I desperately look for my wife. All I see is grim faces with little to no hope, everybody feeling the same nerves and sadness knowing they may not be able to get the vaccine and may go back to being stuck in a society that there was no point in moving forward. Finally, I spot my wife raising her tattoo-covered arm in the air, instantly recognizing the dazzling rose tattoo she had from her

elbow to her wrist. The exclamation on her face was like seeing a kid entering a candy store, pure joy and happiness. I run to her and embrace her.

"You cannot go running like that," she says. "I would have no idea what to do if I were to lose you. From now on please stick by my side and don't risk losing me over a sandwich being stolen." She was right, the reason I had fought through the struggles and pushed to Times Square was not because I wanted to give myself a shot at a better life but rather keeping the love of my life safe and giving us a chance to possibly start a new life and family. Her smile and aqua eyes were my true reason for fighting, the reason I would find a way to get two green dotted cards for us, no matter how I had to get the dot. The loudspeakers sounded again. "I want to tell everyone a few things about the cards," said Doctor Millsap. "The cards you receive cannot be drawn on or altered thanks to our newest technologies. You will hope to receive a card with a green dot, a color I chose because it represents life." That statement shook the crowd, you could hear people talking about how life was brought up. Did this mean certain death if you were not to get a green card? What would happen if not every family member received a card? Many questions remained and many unsteady citizens awaited the lottery.

Finally, five extravagant machines arrived tagged as the "Vaccine Lottery Machines. This immediately caught the eye of everyone there. Five machines that looked like something out of a fancy casino looked to control your destiny and the future of your life. The built-up tension was noticeable; you could hear people screaming and yelling about the unfairness of the system and the incapability of the government to produce more vaccines. "Why don't we move away?" my wife says. "We can look for a safe place without relying on a machine." Puzzled, I looked at her as if she were an alien. She was aware of the lack of communication between New York City and the outside world; no one knew what the world was like outside of the city. Many including myself were not trying to find out. "You know it is not a risk I'm willing to take," I said. "For all we know everybody could be zombies." Many rumors flew around; nobody who had explored outside the city to check the rumors had returned. Maybe it was a paradise as some thought, and they didn't want to leave after. My thinking was very different.

Ignorance Isn't Always Bliss

Madison Owens

The sun set hours ago, and the streets are empty as most of the city of Phoenix sleeps. Sophia's work shift has just begun and her once joyful presence at work has gone seemingly bland. This was her third night shift this week, which doesn't seem like a big deal, but she and countless others have been over-worked for the last year and then some. It's April of 2021 now, and she had only just accepted a position at Saint Joseph's General Hospital in May of 2019 - innocently unaware of what being a respiratory therapist would look like for the next several years. An overwhelming sense of exhaustion and numbness sweep over her face as she puts all her belongings in a locker designated just for her, decorated with pictures of her fiancée and her parents, all of whom miss her despite seeing her often. They miss the light that she once was, her contagious laugh, and seeing her for more than a couple hours at a time. Covid-19 has been wreaking havoc for over a year, and to say Sophia and all her coworkers are feeling defeated would be the understatement of the year. The last few stragglers from day shift have all gone home for a good night's rest, and everyone on night shift has just settled in for the next ten hours, most of them gripping their travel mugs for dear life, hoping the coffee will start to kick in.

"Did you hear that vaccines supposedly have microchips in them now?" Sophia's colleague, Laura, proclaimed with an eye roll, and a curl of the lip. Comedic relief has been one of few silver linings for front line workers - they'll take what they can get.

"It's becoming more difficult by the day to care for people who choose not to believe medical professionals, or trust what they have to say, until the moment they walk through those doors needing our help," Sophia responded, with her pointer finger raised towards the Emergency Room entrance.

Before the two can even get their laughter under control, the doors swing open. A man no older than fifty shuffles towards the check-in desk, with very apparent respiratory distress. Sophia and Laura share a quick glance - "and so our night begins," Sophia says. The open concept of Saint Joseph's allows for nurses and respiratory therapists to see the main doors, and the herds of people who have been flowing in and out of them for the last year. The walls are draped with eggshell white paint, and the air smells of cleaning products, and that infamous brisk hospital air conditioning. Down the hall, Sophia can hear one of her patients wheezing, and she knows that their breathing has only gotten worse - her patient's prognosis has only declined in the days they'd been there, but there were no beds in the hospital to be admitted into - she'd been in the emergency room for five days. It wasn't uncommon these days for a patient with Covid to enter the hospital, and never make it back out. It pulls at her heart strings to watch those who have been nothing but cautious, be ravaged by the virus.

The man who had come in with a complaint of having a hard time breathing had just been placed in room 3. Sophia and Laura were assigned the same patients for the night and were both assisting in different rooms when they heard commotion coming from the front. It appears the patient in room 3 brought his wife with him, and she had just been parking the car. While it was thought to be common knowledge at this point, there were no visitors allowed in hospitals, so naturally she decided to take out her anger on the individuals who work in the hospital who have zero control over state regulations. Common knowledge has proven to be not so common over the last year or two. Sophia lets security deal with the

issue, as she proceeds into the new patient's room. His name is James, and he is very clearly having trouble breathing, and running a fever of 101.4 degrees.

"James, I know you're not feeling well but you do have to keep your mask on while I ask you a couple of questions, okay?" Sophia requests.

"Even though I can't breathe I still have to wear this stupid thing?" he scoffs back at her.

"Unfortunately, the mask isn't what's hindering your ability to breathe sir. Have you been tested for Covid-19 in the last three days?" Sophia asked in a mundane, almost routine, tone.

"Oh hell, why would I go get tested? It's basically just the flu, this is probably something different." James is beyond short of breath at this point, and words come out every few seconds rather than in a flowing sequence. Sophia knows this isn't good but continues through her normal procedures.

"Well, we can't be too sure, so we will give you a rapid test. Have you gotten a Covid-19 vaccine?"

"Oh hell, that's just a way for the government to try and control us. I would never put that stuff in my body."

Sophia wasn't surprised. She explained to him that a nurse would be by with his rapid test in a moment, and she'd return with the results and a more concrete plan for treatment. While the nurse was administering his test, Sophia went to check on her long-term ER patient, Rose. Rose was admitted into the hospital when she started experiencing fatigue and trouble taking a deep breath. She and her husband, Charlie, had assumed it was a side effect from her chemo treatment – she'd been diagnosed with breast cancer earlier that year – diminishing most of her body's ability to fight off disease. She had already received both doses of the vaccine and had practiced all precautions. Every day she'd been in the hospital, she'd thanked every health care worker who entered her room, she oozed kindness and humility. But today, she was in a rapid decline. Her cancer treatment left her exhausted, and being sick on top of it left her unable to muster up any strength. There is a common misunderstanding of intubating a patient with Covid. Patients who simply have a hard time breathing and have a cough are often able to pull through without intubation, or a ventilator. With Covid, comes fatigue – and that fatigue can be enough to make you unable to sit up to cough on your own. Imagine for a moment, being so unbelievably tired that you can't simply just cough. This is followed by buildup in the lungs, and an even more difficult time trying to breathe on your own. The moment Sophia walked into Rose's room, she knew it was time for a ventilator. In the distance, she heard nurses discussing the possibility of James also needing a ventilator. His test had come back positive, and he was unresponsive to oxygen. On any normal day (not when there is a world-wide pandemic hacking at all your resources), two intubations with ventilators wouldn't be anything she'd have to worry about. But, as she and Laura were prepping their carts to go into James' and Rose's rooms, they realized the hospital only had one single ventilator left. They looked at each other dumbfounded, and immediately starting spitballing ideas.

"We could call surrounding hospitals," Laura insisted.

"I had one of the nurses check already, they are completely out. What if we upped James' oxygen slightly to see if there's any improvement?" Sophia said in a concerned tone.

"I tried, and it was unsuccessful. He is in a rapid decline," said Laura.

“Well James didn’t get the vaccination, don’t you think we at least owe it to Rose to fight for her life, since she’s done all that she’s supposed to?” Sophia proclaimed.

This really got the two of them thinking, if this were a question of who deserves to live, who would they choose to ventilate? On one hand, Rose has been struggling to beat cancer for over six months, with little to no improvement and her prognosis was less than a year. James, however, looked at Covid with his ignorance goggles, and decided to do absolutely nothing to help himself or those around him. They had to come to terms with the fact that, even though he didn’t want to help others, they made a promise to do so every single day they clocked in for their shift. They knew James would be far more likely to survive his conditions than Rose, and when the reality sunk in – tears filled their eyes as they stood there in silence surrounded by medical supplies in a dimly lit closet.

After contacting Charlie about Rose’s condition, it had been decided that she would go into Hospice care. He was reluctant, as he had been convinced that cancer would be the thing to take his beautiful wife, and that they were supposed to have at least a few more months together. While nurses prepared her accommodations, Sophia and Laura spoke with the doctor on shift, who agreed with the arrangements they had made, signing off on them to proceed with intubating James. They took the cart to room three and began to prepare the patient for the ventilator. James let out a few grunts, and stressed exhales – they could tell he was struggling. He had come in coherent just a few hours prior, and now was almost unresponsive. James’ wife had been sitting in the car in the parking lot after being asked to leave the hospital for her unwillingness to comply with the rules. The doctor called her cell phone, told her the plan, and said he’d call the moment he was hooked up successfully to a ventilator. Both Laura and Sophia were having a tough time grasping this decision – they both felt he was a bit undeserving of this care – but being in the medical field doesn’t allow for you to make decisions based off of personal opinion. They kept picturing Charlie crying, holding his wife’s hand as she barely held onto life. They begin the intubation, as James gasps for air, a noise engrained in their minds permanently. They hook up the breathing tube to the ventilator, flip the power switch and... nothing. They try several different outlets, still nothing. It was in that moment that Sophia saw a post-it stuck to the bottom of the ventilator. “Broken – being picked up to be fixed sometime this week” was all it said. They had exhausted all of their options; James wouldn’t make it through the night. There was nothing they could do. They were only four hours into their shifts – six more to go.

“Hopefully by the end of 2021, this will all be done and over with,” Sophia said.

“There’s no way this goes on for more than two years,” Laura said with a glimmer of hope.

The Dandelion

Kathleen Fromwiller

I stood in a crack on a sidewalk on a very hot, sunny day.
Though no human walked past me, no car drove on the pavement,
No dog stopped to eat me. It was like the humans had disappeared into thin air.
A door opened and I thought, "Maybe I'll see one!"
They never came through – instead the human headed back inside,
With a piece of cloth on their face.
Since when do humans place a piece of cloth over their nose and mouth?
I guess I'll never know.
As the sun set today, I realized tomorrow would be another day
Of the same thing.

Bird's Eye View

Amir Peay

"I can't see it! Is it the crack you're focused on? Or is it the flower?"

"NO! It's bigger than that, there's a world down there, YOU SEE IT!"

"From up here, it just looks like a flower."

"Maybe you're just crazy."

"Crazy, I'm imaginative my friend, is a flower all you see in your vision until the end? Or are you just focused on what your eyes can't see? That, my friend, is no ocean to me."

"I don't understand, why is everybody hiding away in their houses for a year now?"

"Relax, breathe, take it all in until the odd man wearing a mask walks out his house again, this time he'll step over it."

"This time he'll step on it he's already broken his mom's back on that crack, so he shouldn't have anything to worry about. All the hospitals are closed too."

"Stores have been closed for months now, apparently there's a virus going around."

"Isn't anyone going to come outside and feed us? I thought people loved nature."

"No, everyone's scared. Us animals are not affected by it, so we do not have to worry."

"I don't understand it either, why is everybody wearing the same mask?"

"I'm happy I'm not human because I would miss out on seeing all my friends because the world is closing everything off, even schools. I haven't seen a single kid run out of their doors to catch a bus."

"I would miss my friends too."

Two years ago, when Covid first came into effect it was difficult because everything started to close up. In March 2020, I went to the movies the weekend after my last week of school without knowing that everything would be closed after the weekend came to an end. I remember everybody begging for schools to open up again and for us to be able to go back to school, as well as them saying they would never miss a day of school again.

The Bell in the Corner

—at Roswell Park Cancer Institute

Lisa Wiley Moslow, SUNY Erie Associate Professor of English

So much depends
upon

a shiny brass
bell

waiting in
the corner

beside an
open window

Reminiscing About You

Bishal Guragai

Young, but so much in love,
Each moment seemed perfect.
The summer we spent together,
With the sun shining, bringing the warmth
For us to create memories.
I still think about you,
Each time I listen to the mixtape.
Each time I smile when I think of you.
I wonder where you are,
Do you think of me?
Because you are my September song,
I can't stop listening to you.
I reminisce about you.
I can't stop loving you.

Black Dagger
Bishal Guragai

The dagger of love pointed at my heart,
When I was going to fetch water.
 The water that I never fetched,
 Because of the pointed and sharp words that I heard.
The words that are rarely recalled after departing,
Begging for forgiveness in fear of nursing the inflicted wounds.
 The inflicted wounds from the black dagger
 Remind me of the light rains that hit easy.
But will always leave its mark,
With unacceptable excuse or sorry.

Year 2020

Hanna Wozniak

Can quarantine end?

Only 10 people maximum at gatherings

Respiratory tract infections

Ongoing pandemic

Never ending depression

Always wear your mask

Very lucky to be alive while so many others died

Iwas so lonely

Ruined my college experience

Universal chaos

Sore throat

The Pre-Pandemic

Hanna Wozniak

March 9, 2020 was my first day at my new job. I began my career as an Occupational Therapist at Sister's Hospital in the city of Buffalo. As excited as I was, I was also nervous. I did not know what to expect nor did I know the type of people I would be working with.

I remember my drive to work that morning as clear as day. I was listening to the radio, and they were talking about how they see our entire country shutting down in a few weeks and for a week or two because of COVID-19, the corona virus, and it was spreading fast. Looking back on that day makes me laugh, remembering everyone's beginning thoughts to the pandemic before it even started. I remember my predictions and anxieties from back then too. Part of me was petrified. I thought the world was going to end. A type of situation that would result in something crazy like a zombie apocalypse, or war. Another part of me felt that this was dramatic, that nothing was going to change, and life would be the same as it always had been. I guess what really made me worried then and now was the fear of the unknown and uncertain, as this virus was very uncertain to medical professionals.

The hospital sent protocol to me a few weeks before my first day that I must purchase protective gear along with my hospital scrubs.

The email I received went on to say, "We're not sure what all this talk about a deadly virus is, but as medical professionals we must lead the pack and begin the use of face masks." I thought to myself, "You've got to be kidding, a face mask? Really? How do we even know if we need this? I am going to look so dumb. I am not a surgeon I am an OT." I didn't realize how lucky I was to have received that email at the time.

When I parked, I went to the 5th floor where the OTs were stationed to be. Luckily, they were all wearing face masks and protective gear too. They were all friendly to me when I introduced myself, which was nice because the last thing I want to deal with is drama. I was partnered with a higher up, who was running a little behind and the patient was waiting to be seen. I will never forget this man. The OTs said he should not have to wait longer than what the time of his was scheduled for, so I had to begin my treatment with him before my partner arrived to take over, then I would assist and observe.

I went in and introduced myself with an unseen smile on my face, "Hello Dave, my name is Kendra, and I will be one of your Occupational Therapists today. How are you doing? How are you feeling?"

Dave replied, "Hi Kendra, I am fine. My shoulder is hurting me badly." He went on to say, "What is on your face? You look ridiculously dumb! HAHA!"

I was stunned. Not even a half hour into the job and this was the first card I was dealt. I told myself to play it cool and be professional.

I responded by saying, "Due to the Corona Virus, us hospital staff are required to wear this face covering to protect ourselves and the people around us from the potential

threat of this deadly virus. But let's get started on some active range of motion. Can you raise your hand up as high as you can?"

Dave went on to say, "I see... do we patients have to wear those masks?"

"I am not sure," I replied. "This is my first day on the job and I have not heard any talk regarding that."

"I hope not." Dave begins to elevate his voice, "That would not even work! I have rights you know, and so do you and you should not have to put up with that nonsense!" My partner, Julie, walked in and apologized for her late arrival. I did not say anything back because I was a little upset given the awkward interaction I had been already facing. Julie was also wearing a face mask and Dave said, "UGH! You too, Julie? They have you guys by the necks!"

Julie explained, "Dave, it is protocol for us professionals, and for you as well starting tomorrow as Governor Cuomo announced a few days ago that we will have a statewide mask mandate."

Dave mumbled, "Yeah we'll see about that." Well, that did not sound too promising. I was always the type of person that would listen to the medical professional in times of a medical decision no matter how big or small. I also see myself, politically, as directly in the middle on the left to right scale. I feel like everyone should always listen to the opinion of a health care worker, no matter their political views and how they were brought up to see the world. Especially in unknown times like we were and are still facing.

The next day was the second day of my job. What a day that was. I had the same morning as the day before and had Dave again for OT. I was nervous. I had a bad feeling he would not be wearing a mask, and if we asked him to, I felt like he would make a big scene. He was correct that he has rights as an American citizen and as a client.

Julie was on time that morning and we went in together to see Dave, and sure enough, my gut feeling was right, and he was not wearing a mask. There was one sitting beside him on the bench he was sitting on. When we were walking in, he seemed very angry.

"Hi Dave, how are you doing?" I anxiously asked.

"Not great at all Kendra!" he responded. "I got lectured by three different hospital staff to put a mask on. I told them I did not want to, and they threatened to throw me out of the hospital! This is already so ridiculous I should not have to be restricted of my freedom like this!" The three of us were just staring at each other for a few seconds, as Julie and I did not know what to say. I finally got the courage to speak and asked Julie if she and I could speak in the hallway for a minute. She followed me into the hallway.

"So, what do you think?" I said to Julie. "If we make him put a mask on, that goes against the ethical principle of autonomy, their freedom of choice, and that could start a big chaotic scene. If we do not make him put a mask on, that is not fair, and we could get into some legal trouble because it is against the state mandate to not wear one now."

Julie explained in response, “Well, Kendra, either choice we make we are going to face some legal issue. Making him put the mask on will get us in trouble as OTs because we would be breaking one of our ethical principles. Not making him put the mask on could potentially have the hospital sued and start an even bigger battle,”

I answered, “We should go back inside and tell him the risks of not wearing one. With the mandate being new, maybe if he still refuses, we just let it go.” Julie agreed. My thinking process was that either choice we made would get us in trouble, so we might as well try to get him to wear a mask.

When we walked back into the room, I said, “So Dave, we talked, and we feel it is crucial that you wear a mask. The way we see it, medically, is that this is a rapid spreading virus, and it can kill many people. We are saying this because we care. We would not want you to catch the virus and give it to others and then have you pass away or have any of your loved ones pass away. We are sorry for the interactions you faced a few minutes ago and we understand how you feel but think about the long-term effect.”

“Well,” Dave says, “I did not think about it that way. I would hate to get sick or see my loved one’s sick. I will always put my family first.” He then proceeded to put the mask on. I could not believe that worked. He was completely okay with wearing it once he was made aware of what could happen if he did not put it on. It made me feel happy. Julie and I did not ethically break any rules of our practice, but we explained the risks of his intended actions.

Looking back on that experience, I still feel I made the right choice medically and ethically. Although the mandate was new at the time, our decision did not expose us individually to disciplinary actions, and it also limited exposure to the facility for potential litigation. It was important he knew what could, and eventually did, end up happening with the spread of COVID-19. Two years later there are still people who refuse to wear a mask for their own personal reasons. Two years of this pandemic occurring. If every person understood the potential threat of their actions, and decided to wear masks, maybe the pandemic would have ended long ago.

Covid Champions

—Letter to the Editor

Mathew Kerchenski

During the seventh inning of game six of the World Series, the Los Angeles Dodgers pulled their third baseman Justin Turner from the game due a positive Covid-19 test. In 2020, a positive Covid-19 test has become the new normal but what transpired after the game is what created a media buzz. The Dodgers won the World Series and after the game was over the celebration began. Turner returned to the field to celebrate with his teammates despite being placed in isolation. There is speculation whether Turner will or will not receive punishment for returning to the field to celebrate with his teammates, but I do not believe he should be punished.

I believe Turner should not be punished because if you watch videos taken of the celebration, his teammates are embracing his presence. Although Turner was removed from the game, a World Series win is a once in a lifetime experience. Turner has worked towards achieving this level of baseball success for his entire life and may never have this opportunity again. On the opposing view, I understand that Turner did not follow Covid-19 protocol when he joined his team in celebrating which included removing his mask to take photos. Although the players embraced Turner during the celebration, there were family members and team personnel that were placed at risk. If additional positive Covid-19 tests occur as a result of the celebration, Turner and Major League Baseball may have negative repercussions.

Baseball or Bust

Anthony Ballistrea

Brenham, Texas: The Baseball Capital of Texas. Baseball is all anyone in the small town of Brenham, Texas talked about, thought about, cared about. If the Brenham High School baseball team didn't make it to the state championship, the season was a failure. This was something that Brian never wanted to have to deal with. Since Brian was first on the varsity baseball team as an eighth grader, the team went to state each season. They never won, yet, but they made it there.

Brian had been a star on the varsity baseball team since he was in middle school. Brian was brought up to varsity when he was in eighth grade and became the starting shortstop halfway through the season. Brian had big dreams that he was chasing. He wanted nothing more than to lead the Cubs to state, and win. After he graduated, he wanted to go on to play Division I Baseball, hopefully at Vanderbilt University, and then get drafted into the MLB.

This season was Brian's junior season in school. He knew that it was time to ramp up his work and get all of his teammates on the same page as him. It was time to win the state championship. The team just got back to school after winter break, and it was now January 2020; open practices began and the real push for state was beginning. After school each day, Brian went right to the baseball field. He was always the first one there and the last one to leave.

When Brian left the field that day and went home, he went home to a surprise he had been waiting for. "Brian, you got some mail today!" his mom yelled from the back porch. Brian walked into the kitchen to see what mail she was talking about. There they were: letters of interest from the University of Texas, University of Houston, and Baylor University. No letter from Vanderbilt. Why was Brian so stuck on Vanderbilt? Vanderbilt's baseball team produced many top baseball players that got drafted into the MLB. Brian knew he had to get himself to Vanderbilt to keep his dreams of the MLB alive.

Brian walked outside to see his mom. "Three letters," he said, "All from great schools and baseball programs, but not the one I want." His mom looked at him with sympathy. "It is still early," she said, "Baseball season is right around the corner, you know that Coach Taylor will make sure they know about you!"

Coach Taylor has been Brian's coach for years now. He knew Brian's goals and dreams of playing baseball at another level. He saw the work that Brian put in day in and day out. He noticed his work in the weight room and when he was out on the baseball field alone. Coach Taylor knew that Brian had what it took to play Division I baseball, as well as go on to play in the major leagues.

Brian was working hard in the offseason but all of that got put on hold. On March 13th, 2020, the students were all sent home with their school issued laptops and were given extra work from their teachers. None of the students really understood what was going on. They heard whispers that school was going to be closed for a little while, but they didn't know why. The students were sent home, with no idea when they would be back.

Brian arrived home and saw both of his parents watching the news on TV. "What is going on?" Brian asked his parents, "We could tell there was something going on at school, but no one told us anything." Brian's dad walked over to him and told him something about a Coronavirus, a disease spreading throughout the world and causing many people to get

sick, many dying. Brian didn't really think anything of it, all he knew was that he was off school for two weeks. Brian smiled at the thought of no school, but his smile disappeared when he thought this might also mean no baseball.

When April came, it was officially announced that school would be closed, and students would not be returning. Students would be required to take their classes online and learn through Zoom. What teenage kid wouldn't love to hear that they didn't have to go back to school? Most of them, except for those that are looking toward their future. This announcement hit Brian hard. He instantly thought about all he had to lose, all the hard work he put into school and baseball, and all of it going away in a blink.

Brian felt sorry for himself. He forgot that he wasn't the only one that this affected. He thought this was a sign that he would never get recruited to go to Vanderbilt. Brian could not push out the fact that his dreams crumbled in front of him. Brian's parents noticed the change in his attitude and desire to do anything. "Brian," his dad called out, "You know this is not the end of the world. Baseball is just a sport. There are bigger things to worry about right now." Brian knew his dad was right, but he wasn't ready to give up on his dreams just because the country, and most of the world, was shut down.

Brian woke up the next day and decided that he was going to be more positive about this shut down. There was no reason why he couldn't continue to work on himself and work on his game. Brian decided to make a workout area in the basement. Brian also found a spot outside where he could set up a net and keep working on his baseball skills. Brian was set; he had all he needed to continue working toward his dreams...or so he thought.

After following this routine for months, Brian felt defeated. It was now June 2020. The Brenham Cubs should have won state by now. That was a tough thought for Brian to push out of his head. Brian needed something more. He went on his phone and started Googling, "How to get better at baseball." He was scrolling for a while until he saw an article about steroids. Brian learned about steroid use in health class, how they could make someone stronger and faster, exactly what Brian needed to improve at. Brian thought that no one would ever know; the world was still shut down and he barely saw his friends. Brian decided that he would keep this secret to himself and that he would only use steroids until school reopened and baseball started again in the fall.

It was announced in early August that students would return to school based on their regular schedule. The only change was that they had to wear a mask covering their mouth and nose, as well as keep distanced from other students. Brian was so relieved, his quest to lead the Cubs to state and get recruited to Vanderbilt was back on.

Fall baseball began as soon as the students returned to school. Everyone was impressed with Brian; he was bigger, stronger, and quicker. Everyone thought he used the shutdown to work out and take care of his body, no one knew Brian's secret. Brian was so happy with the positive feedback about the improvements he made that he didn't want to stop using the steroids now. His life was back to how he wanted it to be, and he knew his dreams were within reach.

Coach Taylor noticed the change in Brian. He was hitting the ball farther and harder. His range improved and his arm strength definitely improved. Brian also seemed more irritable, he was quick to go off on a player who wasn't working hard or who made a mistake. Coach Taylor knew this wasn't Brian. He knew that working out over the shutdown wouldn't make someone change this much. Coach Taylor became suspicious that Brian had something more going on.

Coach Taylor continued to observe Brian's changes, changes in his game and changes in his attitude. He couldn't let it go on any longer, he needed to confront Brian and make sure he didn't ruin his future, or his life. Coach Taylor went over to Brian's house after school, he knew it would be hard to confront and expose Brian, especially in front of his parents.

Coach Taylor rang the doorbell, and Brian answered, surprised. "Hey coach, what's going on?"

"Hi Brian, I wanted to talk to you, I hope that it is okay I stopped over." Brian let Coach Taylor in and led him to the living room. Brian's parents came into the room and sat down too. "Brian, I am going to get to the point of my visit. I have noticed all of the changes you have made in your game and your body. However, I have noticed a change in your attitude also. I have my suspicions about what is going on, and I am hoping I am wrong, but I wanted to make sure before the real season started. Have you been using steroids?"

Brian sat staring, stunned. How did coach know? Brian slowly looked at his parents, shock on their faces, his mother beginning to cry. Brian spoke up, figuring he needed to be honest. "Yes, coach. I have been using steroids. I thought that with the shutdown, no one would ever know. I wanted to stop once we got back to school, but I couldn't. All the guys looked at me like I was the best player in the world, I couldn't let that go!" Brian was crying now. It hit him that he made a huge mistake and that he might have just ruined any future he had in baseball. He looked at his parents and at Coach and apologized.

Coach Taylor looked at Brian sternly, "Brian, what we all just went through in this pandemic has been extremely hard. I know you have felt that you have lost something important to you, but you still have time to be recruited to Vanderbilt. There is still an opportunity for the coaches to see you play and for them to offer you a scholarship. But the steroid use must stop now. And this needs to stay between us, in this room, and never spoken of again." Coach Taylor looked hard at Brian and his parents. They looked at each other and mutually agreed that they would help Brian to get clean, and never speak of the steroid use again.

Brian felt a lot of guilt, especially because he knew his coach should have reported him and probably kicked him off the team. Brian promised to stop using steroids and promised to work on and off the field even harder. He did not want his teammates, other coaches, or anyone to know what he did. Looking back, he knew he made a huge mistake, but it was in the past now and Brian needed to look at his future.

The Brenham Cubs went on to win the Texas State Baseball Championship. Brian won Texas State Player of the Year, as well as MVP. Coach Taylor helped him to get recruited and Vanderbilt offered Brian a full scholarship to play at the university. All of Brian's dreams had come true, but he continued to have to live with his secret.

Another Day, Another Dollar

—after “Bullet in the Brain”

Skylar Ferro

It was a dark, gloomy day. The birds were quiet, and the skies were dull. It has been like this for months and has become the new norm. Just recently the banks had opened as many individuals were desperate for money. With toilet paper low and everybody caged inside of their homes, money had become the only thing of value around these parts. Getting dressed I looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were dark. The rings around them were as strong as an engagement ring. I rubbed my throat and sighed. My profession required me to speak in such a way to where my voice would occasionally give out. Although I considered it boring, being a Bank Teller did have its golden moments. And the ratio of delightful customers to customers who held poor attitudes was rather manageable.

After buttoning the top button on my blue business suit, I grabbed my keys, my mask and headed out of my crappy studio apartment. Rent has gotten so much more expensive ever since the virus hit. If not for my side jobs, I would be dirt poor and eating dirt cheeseburgers or lasagna made from rats. This life was miserable. However, each day I try to look on the more optimistic side of life despite what it throws at me and during times like this I am very grateful for my job. I could feel a smile stretch upon my face as I continued to think about all the time and effort I put into my jobs. My car may have been sold in order to pay my rent, resulting in me to walk miles in this rain but all in all, just trying made me happy. Soon enough, I had arrived at the bank. My hair dripped onto the concrete as I pulled my mask out of my back pocket and slipped it over my face.

Taking in a deep breath, I took a moment to collect my thoughts. Then **BOOM!** I kicked the door in! The hall turned quiet as I reached into my bag and pulled out a pistol. “One of you tellers hits the alarm, you’re all dead meat. Got it?” I screamed through my ski mask. I recognized my coworker, Sylvia. She had tears flowing down the sides of her face, which was heavily packed with makeup, although it wasn’t the silent citizens or my overdramatic coworkers that caught my attention. It was the one middle aged man who was smiling- no LAUGHING- at me!!! He thought this was a joke! Going on and on about me using a script.

Did he not know the financial crisis that everybody is going through? I wasn’t trying to rehearse for the next role in Annie! This was the quickest and easiest way to fill your pockets. Besides, the bank wasn’t paying very generously, and I had bills to pay! But this boy kept talking no matter how many times I told him to shut his trap. He was treating this like a game and making mocking gestures.

“You like me, bright boy?” I spoke. “You want to suck my dick?”

He seemed shocked by my words and happily choked on the word “no.” I smirked. That was until I noticed him nonchalantly looking around the building, occasionally down at my shoes and then back at the security guards. He would congratulate them on their acting skills. But this was no play.

I shoved my pistol against his chest to physically show how serious I was. That made his laughter fests dissipate rather quickly. That was until I said the word *Capiche*. For some reason, this man starts snorting and laughing and chuckling like a little kid who just heard the word “boobs.” I have had enough! I pointed my gun to his head and shot him without hesitation. I watched as the bullet went through his cranium. Time seemed to slow down. My palms got sweaty as I looked around. I never intended to kill anybody. I just wanted the money. What have I done?

The man’s body fell in slow motion until it hit the marble floor. I backed up, covering my mouth as the realization of what I was doing hit me harder than the bullet. Whispering the words “I’m sorry,” I hesitantly backed out of my workplace and booked it back home. I knew they were going to come for me, but I had so many feelings I didn’t know how to process. This virus is affecting more than my physical health. It’s also taking control of my mental state! I grabbed at the mask and threw it across the street as I ran up the parking lot to my apartment. I didn’t even bother walking up. Instead, I rounded the corner of the brick wall and collapsed into myself. I never wanted to be infected so bad. Corona virus will be the death of me.

My Descent Toward Alienation

Blake Leslie

As we rewind time to March of 2019, my father and I were preparing to take the trip of a lifetime to Las Angeles, California for an event that eventually could change our lives. During this time, talks of COVID are on the rise and panic is beginning to set across many parts of the globe. What is this virus? How dangerous is this virus? What is going to happen? However, my father and I never perceived it that way. We simply looked at the situation and compared it to history. Almost every single election year there was another virus or disease that created public fear for a short period of time. We never thought this would become the focal point of everything as it is today.

As the talks of masks and travel bans and other mandates began to escalate, I enjoyed myself in California visiting many friends, sitting on the warm beaches while splashing in the Pacific Ocean and most importantly, to me at least, spending time with some rappers in a popular recording studio all day long. If I got in well with these guys, I could get a good job and even become famous. As the time was very well enjoyed, reality came back to haunt me. I would have to go back home to a Certified Nursing Assistant job at the rehab facility back home.

Upon returning home many things had changed. Disney and Universal that I just left in California were closed due to COVID concerns. The home area was changing too, work had become a whole different environment and we had to adapt quickly. From now on to be on the unit you had to be always in full personal protective equipment. This was torture, since the nursing home is already hotter than a summer day. Wearing all that gear in my opinion was overkill. At the time all we knew was there was some new virus circulating around the world that originated in China and people were dying. Although we knew very little about this virus, I still referred to previous years and the constant scares of new illnesses arousing every election year. I was not going to let this virus ruin my life or control the things I could or couldn't do.

As time went on many people became COVID positive and the policy was to send them to St. Joe's hospital which was converted into a COVID only facility. We sent over sixty patients to St. Joe's during this time resulting in over forty patients passing away. We sent so many patients we were completely closing units. As this was a bit of a scare to us, I still didn't let it change my perception. I still wasn't going to let my life be controlled by the government and this virus that was manufactured in a lab. In addition to all the mess that was taking place there we then began to get COVID tested twice a week! Was it necessary to shove a swab up my nose twice a week? They did not hold back either. Every time I was swabbed, I had a headache for hours and hours after the fact and sometimes even bad bloody noses. "Is this really the most efficient way to test for COVID?" Regardless I had no choice, I had bills to pay and many plans that I couldn't take part in with no money.

After putting in two years of work at the nursing home, I came to the realization that the nursing home was not where I was meant to be. I knew I wasn't happy there dealing with the same thing day after day and not feeling challenged. I felt grounded and needed change to increase my motivation levels to get back to school that have at this point plummeted. I applied for aid positions at VA hospital as well as Roswell Park. When I got the call to interview at Roswell Park in the ICU I was blown away. I didn't know what to expect. I was super happy and excited to have an opportunity to work at Roswell as it's

where I ultimately wanted to end my career. However, hearing that I was going to interview for the ICU made my stomach turn. I never thought I would be able to handle seeing the things inside of let alone working in an ICU.

I prepared myself so much for this interview, I made sure I had a nice suit, rehearsed the questions, and brought copies of my credentials. Let's just say I nailed the interview and couldn't be happier to start my new job. I had so much to learn coming into this position. I went from primarily cleaning incontinent patients and turning and positioning them to a world I knew nothing about. In the next four weeks I had a lot to learn including hospital supplies, locations, hospital policies and procedures, managing patient's IV's, assisting in sterile procedures and so much more. I finally felt like I was in a better environment for myself that was faster paced and much more intense than the previous job. On top of all the learning that was required for my job I learned even more things, more in depth diagnosis, treatment plans, normal lab values and more. Having all this information at my fingertips finally gave me the motivation I needed to go back to school. I applied to Erie Community College to the nursing program, not realizing I missed the deadline. I was accepted, however, to the Liberal Arts program to start knocking out prerequisites for the nursing program.

As the time is passing, the talks of COVID have not slowed down at all. Many parts of the country are still in a lock down and many people aren't understanding the true facts of COVID. As people are in paranoia due to the number of deaths, they fail to realize what a COVID death is declared as. There were many stories of doctors who were being forced to write COVID as the cause of death in patient's charts to increase hospital funding. On top of that, the Center for Disease Control was stating a COVID death was to be considered as anyone who dies while at the time of death testing positive for, or having symptoms of, COVID. Buffalo tends to have poor weather for many months of the year, leading to an abundance of the common cold and other illnesses. During this whole COVID pandemic, I have never heard of one person being diagnosed with the flu. It's amazing to me that a virus can have every possible symptom or have no symptoms at all. People were also failing to realize that the survival rate of COVID is significantly greater than 95%!

I thought going to Roswell was going to be a big changing factor on my interactions with COVID and my stress level of having to be in full protective equipment all the time. Little did I know, I had a major surprise coming to me. For having patients who are so immune compromised it's a miracle how few of them got COVID. Something even more surprising than that was the scant amount of cancer patients who ended up in the ICU due to COVID related issues. In addition to that, from the handfuls of COVID patients we have had admitted, I've only seen one of them pass away during this time and all others recovering from COVID and being downgraded from the ICU back down to the floors or some of them even home. In addition to this, there are also policies at many facilities such as Roswell that state we are not allowed to perform an autopsy on a patient who is COVID positive. Since we have had such few cases of COVID I am relieved to not have to be in full protective equipment every day taking care of these patients.

The nurses at Roswell, however, are not very fond of my thinking and take a lot of their frustrations out on me related to the pandemic. Many of them have started becoming very hostile towards me and very degrading due to my own personal beliefs and information I have presented to them. As I know it has caused some conflict with many peer relationships at work, I do everything I can to avoid the problem. No matter what

strategies I use to avoid the conflict, it never goes away. Everyone has become so brainwashed that the only conversations any of my coworkers present are directly related to COVID and restrictions and other policies like such. I don't understand why people even believe in the mandates and masking policies as COVID is still spreading to people who wear masks like it's the only thing they are meant to do in life.

As all these problems are building and I feel myself being weighed down and my morale significantly decreasing, I've noticed other things about me change as well. I have become more hostile, more isolated, more depressed and it causes me to last out at certain people like I couldn't control myself. I feel like I'm at a complete standstill and am in the process of seeking professional help. The part that hurts me the worst is knowing I fell into this dark area. I feel like I have completely fallen victim to a plan set in place by the government because they wanted this type of control on people. I feel like I'm trapped in a dark place, and I'll never make it out. It makes it very hard for me to live my day-to-day life and even function as a human in society due to all these problems.

As devastating as it will be, I feel we need another revolution. History repeats itself, at least that's what all my history teachers have taught me and if that's the case I can't see this being any different. If we want change and want to end the complete government control on every one of our lives, we all need to come together and take a stand. Let's put an end to the government telling us how we can live our lives while they go out daily and live their own. After all, if I'm going to die, I'm going to let it happen however it was meant to. I'm not changing my life to make people feel better about theirs.

Reference

Erbay, H., Alan, S., & KadioÄYlu, S. (2010). A case study from the perspective of medical ethics: refusal of treatment in an ambulance. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 36(11), 652. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jme.2010.035600>

Zoom Therapy, The Struggle is Real

Erika Calandra

Emily sat on her family room floor in her dimly lit house to review her therapy notes from Friday. The world news broadcast on the TV in the background, the glow from the sunset illuminated the room, and the smell of Spring filtered in through a slightly opened window. Just as she began to plan a new activity with her students the next day, she received an email notification but decided to read it later since she didn't want to be distracted from her work. Emily wasn't paying much attention to the TV until something caught her attention, an announcement that schools would be closed for an undetermined amount of time. She immediately opened her email and saw an email from the superintendent.

"Maryvale school staff,

As of tomorrow, March 16, we will be closed, and all are asked to begin to prepare to deliver instruction and services remotely using Zoom. Students will report to school by grade at their scheduled time to pick up their chrome books and any other supplies they will need. All teaching instruction and therapy sessions will be delivered via zoom. Please continue to check your emails for further instructions."

Shocked as she finished reading the email, Emily's phone rang; it was Stacy, another OT she worked with.

"Em, have you checked your email?" asked Stacy.

"Yeah. How are we supposed to do this? This is never going to work. They don't have any equipment at home. How are we going to correct their movements through a screen?" said Emily.

"I don't know how they expect us to make this work," Stacy said frustratedly.

A couple of weeks into online instruction, the problems piled up. Emily began to get emails from frustrated teachers saying they didn't want students pulled from class for therapy sessions. She ran into one obstacle after another due to students' lack of resources at home to do the activities. Getting students to engage through the computer was nearly impossible; most sessions were spent just getting them engaged. Therapy sessions quickly focused on maintaining the therapeutic relationship with the students rather than working towards their goals. Frustrated and concerned, she called Stacy.

"Hello," Stacy answered the phone.

"Hey Stacy, it's Em."

"Hi, is everything ok?" asked Stacy.

"No, I don't know what to do. I don't know how I am supposed to document these sessions when we aren't making any progress," Emily said. "They aren't benefiting from our sessions at all. I feel like all I am doing is damage control, trying to minimize their regression," Emily explained.

Stacy reassured her, "I'm having the same problem. Let's meet this weekend; we can lay out all the problems we are having and troubleshoot them together."

"That would be great, Stacy," said Emily.

Together Emily and Stacy compiled their struggles with the online therapy sessions. They determined the primary problems causing therapy sessions to be ineffective. One problem was having to oversimplify treatment because of the lack of resources available to students at home and also having to rely solely on verbal prompts because touch cues were not possible through the computer. As well as environmental distractions in the students' homes and difficulty getting them engaged and keeping them engaged through the session. Although there was no way to achieve the effectiveness through zoom as in-person therapy would have, they came up with a few solutions to maximize their effectiveness.

"Ok, I think our biggest problem is getting the kids engaged," said Stacy.

"I agree; it feels like we are introducing ourselves at the beginning of each session," Emily responded.

"We could start each session with a short game; that seems to be when they are the most engaged," Stacy suggested.

"How about the dice yoga game? Each number 1-6 has an exercise to get up and move. They can roll the die twice to get them engaged at the start of their session and every time we feel like we are losing them, have them roll it again," Emily asked excitedly.

"That's the perfect game for that! We could also play Simon says!" said Stacy.

"Yes!" Emily agreed emphatically.

"What if we ask their parent or guardian to sit with them during the sessions? We could direct them on how to help them since we can't use touch cues ourselves," asked Emily.

"Yeah, that could work. Especially to correct with activities like cutting. We could direct them to use touch cues to keep their thumb up," explained Stacy. "Having an adult there could be helpful for any distractions going on at home too."

Emily jumped up and asked excitedly, "What if we put together little kits for them?"

"Yeah! They can pick them up when they come to get their work from their teachers!"

Together they assembled OT kits for all their students. They included playdough, scissors, silly putty, dice, and markers. With the newly available supplies, Emily was able to reintroduce many activities they used to do during in-person therapy sessions that they had not been able to since being remote. Although it still wasn't the same quality as in-person therapy, Emily felt much more confident and at peace about writing her therapy notes for billing services now that she and Stacy had a plan to provide quality activities.

The Story of a Weekend

Mia Marino

Hello, my name is Londyn Mallard and this is the story of the last few days of my life. It all started the day I found out my beloved husband Brayden ended up in the hospital deathly sick after catching Covid-19. There was nothing to help him. No vaccines, no medication. Absolutely nothing. I lost the love of my life to it and inevitably died with him but mine was not from Covid but rather heartbreak that my soulmate had died. Now let's get on with my story. It was a Friday afternoon. It seemed like any other day, but it ended up being the worst day of my life.

"Londyn. Londyn are you home?" That's my sister Josie. She came running into my house sounding worried yelling for me. "I am here. What's wrong?" I said from the living room as my sister came rushing in with a saddened look on her face. I stood up quickly when I saw her state. "Josie, did something happen?" I said as I looked at my sister. She was trying to figure out how to tell me the news that would shatter my heart. "It's Brayden. He's in the hospital." Those words. Those words are what shattered my heart into a million pieces. After those words came out of her mouth everything became quiet. Josie was still talking but I could not hear a word she was saying. All I could think about was Brayden. I fell to the ground sobbing as my sister comforted me.

"Where is he? Where is my Brayden? I need to see him," I said in between sobs. "Come I will take you to see him." I got up as quickly as my body would let me and we drove to the hospital. All I could think about was my love. Thinking about if he was going to make it or not. So many people did not make it alive from Covid. I was silently praying that he would make it. He needs to make it. I can't live without him. I won't live without him.

The drive felt like it took forever. My sister was trying to talk to me, but my ears were ringing. I couldn't hear anything, only my thoughts and prayers. We rushed into the hospital to his room. Josie stayed out while I walked in to see him with a bunch of wires connected to him. He had an oxygen tube. All I could hear was the beeps to tell me he was still alive. I walked over to him. As I sat down, he looked over at me and smiled at me. I loved his smile. It was my favorite thing about him. I kept thinking to myself over and over why it had to be him. Why did he have to be in the hospital sick?

"My love," he said with a low raspy voice. I grabbed his hand crying. He wiped the tears away while smiling at me with his beautiful smile. "Do not cry my love, I am right here. I am okay, no need to worry." He coughed. And coughed. And coughed. I cried even more. He was in pain, and it broke me to see him suffering. I wish I could take it away. Make him feel better. After some time with him I had left for just a moment to get him something to drink when the doctors were rushing to a room. It was his room. I ran towards them rushing in. "What's wrong?" I asked as they were crowding him. He was unconscious but still alive. "Ma'am you cannot be in here." As he said those words all I could hear was *beeeeeeeep*. My heart sank. As I fell to the ground crying and screaming in one of the nurse's arms. "No. No. No!" I sobbed harder.

I ran to his body trying to wake him up. "Please. Please wake up. Brayden. Please." I said the last word quietly. Josie came rushing in hugging me. "He's gone. He's gone. I won't be able to see him again." Josie just hugged me letting me cry. She took me home but all I could think about was him. I was lost without him. I hadn't stopped crying since that

moment. As my sister brought me upstairs to my bedroom. Our bedroom. I cried harder seeing our room. Seeing our bed. Our pictures and memories.

She helped me into bed. I just laid there looking at the picture of us on the nightstand next to our bed. She changed me into one of his shirts. It smelled like him. I just laid there crying in his shirt on the side he always slept on. Josie didn't leave me alone. She felt she couldn't while I was in this state. And I don't blame her. I wouldn't either if the roles were reversed. But they weren't. I was angry and broken. Angry that it had to be him. That he had to become sick and die. That he left me. I was broken because of my other half. The person who made me laugh and smile like no one has before was gone forever.

I don't know when I fell asleep or if I even did but it was morning now. I woke up feeling the bed hoping what had happened was just a nightmare, but it wasn't; it really happened. I heard a knock on my door, "Londyn it's me, are you awake?" she says as she slowly opens the door sitting beside me. "Hey," she said softly "Come let's go eat something." I didn't say anything, just stared out the window. "You have to eat." No answer. She sighs as she walks out and slowly closes the door behind her. I laid there not leaving my bed and not moving. Just staring out the window. Josie would constantly come in to try and get me to come out and eat but I didn't. I didn't even reply to her. Just laid there in silence.

I knew she was starting to worry about me, but I didn't have the strength to pull myself out of bed. I knew that Brayden would want to get out of bed and eat something, but I just couldn't. I couldn't do anything. His scent was still on the shirt she put on. His scent. He always smelled like the ocean. I closed my eyes taking in the smell as a small smile rose on my face. I will never love anyone other than you Brayden Mallard. You showed me happiness and love. You were everything my father told me to look for and now you're gone, and I can never have you back. It was night again and as my eyes slowly closed as I held onto his shirt tightly, I did not know that would be the last time I would be awake.

Free, free, free

I told you it wasn't a happy ending like in fairy tales. This one had a sad ending. But don't be too alarmed because we found each other again. We made our way back to each other even if technically we aren't living. But soulmates always find each other. So, in a way I think this did have a happy ending, just not in a traditional way.

A Hit in the Dark

Allison Richter

My name is Stacey and I met with Ralph and his wife Marge in their home to discuss care for Marge in April of 2020 the start of the pandemic. Marge had dementia and was limited in her mobility. This meeting included one of their two children who lived nearby named Linda. I grew up with Linda and we were neighbors for most of our childhoods. We both stuck around the Buffalo area. So I initially assumed taking on this home healthcare/ occupational therapist case would be a breeze, seeing how I knew the family once a long time ago. After accepting the job and pondering about this family I once knew, memories began to surface. I remembered climbing trees with the two sisters Linda and Cheryl and how sweet their mother Marge was, always baking for us girls. We were only neighborhood friends, so we never got that close. It was more of a casual relationship. We would play outside together in our backyards until my family and I moved to the town over for my father's writing career. One thing that stuck out to me, though, is the way everyone would straighten up and seemingly act more anxious in the presence of their father. Ralph was decent to me and never did anything out of the realm of normal, but he certainly did not give off warm and fuzzy qualities. I recall feeling like no one including the mother seemed as comfortable around the father as they were with just each other. However, I set these reservations aside seeing how I accepted the job already and was looking for work during the pandemic. I was not sure when another case would come along, and I never witnessed the father being violent or unkind of anything of the sort. I was ready to start this new job.

Marge had dementia and due to a severe fall one-year prior, little use of her arm and hand on left side. Marge had a very limited capacity to speak for herself and usually nodded when asked questions pertaining to her care. From the initial meeting it was clear that Ralph was very much in control of his wife's care and was overwhelmed with the responsibility. Their daughter Linda helped facilitate the meeting and a treatment plan was developed. Home health care would be provided 3 times per week at 3-hour intervals. Personal care, physical therapy, and occupational therapy would be implemented. In the beginning the treatment plan went very well. Marge was assisted in personal hygiene as in assistance in showering and using the bathroom. She was also fed meals and given daily therapy. She responded well to this and seemed to enjoy the attention and care provided. As the occupational therapist and home health care provider, we would practice using her hands and grabbing various household objects. Along with adjusting her living areas such as adding ramps and a shower bench. She was very compliant in doing the occupational therapy exercises and all other beneficial therapies, which also included specific computer games to help with memory. Even though Marge was limited in speech, her personality shined through. We would spend time watching Jeopardy together and she enjoyed sitting with me in the kitchen while I cooked for her. I could tell she did not get these one-on-one interactions when she was here with Ralph. I felt an intense empathy for her and would often think about her on my days off and when we were not together.

Many times, Ralph would be present and spend time talking about his own difficulties in caring for his wife. As I listened to him it became clear that he had very little patience with Marge and her issues. This did not raise a red flag as of yet because many times families will express their hardship in being a loved one's caregiver. Listening is always beneficial because it may help me do a better job in treating someone. Red flags

however did arise when I saw how little food was being given to Marge. She was thin and seemed hungry but because of her communication complications, she could not express this to me. I spoke to Ralph and the daughter Linda about my observations and concerns. Within the week I came to the home as scheduled and walked into the living room where Marge was always seated waiting for me, however this time it felt different. The room was unusually dark and not many lights were on. I turned on one of the lights near Marge and immediately noticed a large bruise on the side of her face. My initial reaction was that she had been hit in the face. I felt a pang of anxiety and empathy surge through my body. I asked her "Marge, are you in pain? You can tell me." She just stared at me. I sat down and took a picture of her face. I waited for Ralph to come into the room. I turned on more lights and pointed out the bruise on Marge's face. Ralph acted completely surprised to see the mark and said that he did not notice it when he got her breakfast and so forth that morning. I asked him to tell me how he thought she came to have the mark. Did she possibly fall in the middle of the night? He started to get nervous. He said she had wet the bed and he had to change the sheets and her clothes etc. His eyes were darting, and you felt like you could cut the air with a knife. However, I was determined to get an answer. I said, "Well, she looks like she was hit in the face." He vehemently denied this. I excused myself and phoned the daughter Linda straight away and informed her that her mom looked like she had been hit in the face.

"Hi Linda, this is Stace. So uhh I have something I need to bring up to you concerning Marge."

"Hello, yes, what is it?"

"When I arrived at your parents' home today, your mother had a mark on her face that looks like a hit mark. I hate to say this, and I understand how difficult this is to hear, but I believe it was your father based on my observations."

"Oh my god, that can't be true. Is it true? I can't handle this. I will have my sister contact you on this. This a family issue."

I felt it was my ethical duty to keep Marge safe under my care. Especially during the pandemic there were not many family members able to visit and see for themselves. There was barely any contact with the outside world at this point due to everything being shut down. I was the only one going in and out of this home and the only person who could advocate for Marge. Delivering the disturbing news was extremely anxiety inducing but I felt confident in my choice of speaking up for her.

From this point on I was referred to talk to the other daughter Cheryl, who was now living in Louisiana. She then flew to Buffalo to help in ascertaining what had occurred and to also have another adult in the home to make sure nothing else happened. I followed up with both daughters and soon found myself in a situation where they denied the possibility of Marge being hit by their father. I explained that I was obligated to get more information and needed her to see a doctor as soon as possible. I could not care for her without a diagnosis because her face needed a doctor's diagnosis. After 4 days I received a call that the doctor said it was a rash. I did not believe the family in this case. My own observations were that Ralph was not equipped to be caring for his wife Marge. He exhibited little patience with her. The biggest red flag was that he denied noticing the huge bruise on her face after helping her all morning. The family dynamics showed that this man may have been enabled by his daughters who were possibly part of this domestic abuse structure. My final ethical decision was to call in adult protective services to come to the home and give

their professional analysis of the situation. At that juncture I did not trust this family's ability to give the information to further assist with their mother's case.

Just Me

Della Gray-Hailey

Who can I be? Just me sassy and unpretentious, I am who I am. People love it, like it or despise it! I say what I feel and mean what I say. Rarely do I say things to hurt people for I am not a jerk. Tact and diplomacy are always me; compassionate and nurturing I am trying to be all I can be, all I can be to the fullest extent and the highest velocity. I pique interest with the greatest curiosity people think I am arrogant not at all. I am self-assured and confident and at times insecure for I am only human. I am just me a proud woman trying to reach my destiny. I am who I am and evolving to be who God wants me to be. I am just me.

I Wish in the Home of Your Heart

—after Robley Wilson

Norman J. Charnock IV

I wish in the in the home of your heart
that you would let me be your room,
the place where you spent so much time alone.
Imagine the colors of your walls and
the corner you've stayed in for weeks upon end,
working away the hours since the closure.
But do not worry, for freedom will come again.

Moving On

Anthony Mathews

Boxes pile, as the once filled space empties
Joyous memories depart with her
What was once a happy home
is now but a hollowed structure

All that remains is the burdensome piano
and the wilting rose that sits atop
The music departs with her trained fingers
Neglected petals lose their reddish hue

Nothing seems to be the same
But good things mustn't last
Although not expected,
change is undeniably welcomed

New growth sprouts in place of old
The sun peeks through just the same
New memories form with open arms
With time a new song will play

Light at the End
James Farrell

Sitting alone at the edge
Of consciousness and my bed
Not remembering this day or the next
Two years of waiting
Waiting for someone,
Or something real to happen
Everything passed by in a blur
Of unintelligible light and sound.

By the Apple Tree

Andrew Pruetz

The apple falls
without one's input
but with energy
a possibility of transformation
and a deposit on death
which was just submitted

It hits the ground and leaves a small noise
and falls on ground bees
the bees buzz
angry at the disturbance

They take off and see people
and buzz toward them and attack
hundreds of bees

All because of a small event
all under the apple tree

Pandemic

Bronwen Harris

When you were a teenager,
You could spend your summers in bed.
You could wrap yourself up in depression,
Let it swaddle you until you were smothered.
Since growing up,
You've had to push it down, hold it back.
It now lives in your blood, a parasite
Consuming from within.
You were almost relieved when the world caught fire.
At least now you could blame it all on something
Other than what's missing inside of you.
At least now you could let your poisoned blood out,
Collect it back into a blanket.
A twisted mirror image of your teenage years,
Adulthood still lurking out of sight.
Maybe this time you won't self-immolate.
Maybe this time the fire outside will jump
Through your window, no one knowing
You left it open on purpose.

No More Disappointment

Anonymous

You were only 8. They beat and raped you, dehumanized you, turned you into property, and they got away with it. You're living with the trauma while they're taking Florida vacations with their pensions.

Oh well. Can't do anything about it. That's life. I'm not disappointed. No one believes me anyway. I should just forget about it.

Your best friend was shot through the head in front of you. By her father.

Oh well. Some people watch countless friends and family die. I'm lucky to just have lost a few.

Dad has moved a thousand miles away, love stolen by another. He visits twice a year. You miss him.

But I can't complain. Some people never meet their fathers. I should be thankful for what I have. I love my dad.

Your mother is abusive. She turned you into an adult at the age of 10, made you raise your brother. In your darkest hour, she told you to "just kill yourself or shut up." She pointed out every flaw you had, and said "You're just like your father," as an insult. You could be the richest person in the world, the smartest, the one who cures cancer, and it would never be enough.

Oh well. I can't leave anyway. Things could be worse. I'm not disappointed. Things are better this way. My father has found love. I'm happy for him. I have a roof over my head and food in my belly and a bed to sleep in. I can't complain. I don't have the right to complain. I've seen the bruises and black eyes left on my friend's body from her mother's relentless beatings.

Just 16 and you're making your third suicide attempt.

Oh well. I lived. I'll be back in school next week anyway. Nothing happened.

Barely 18 and already spending every penny you earn on meaningless objects.

Ah well, that's the human condition. I'm not disappointed.

There's an epidemic. You can only watch as thousands die while a portion of the population goes in ignorance and their misinformation, who'd rather kill than go without a haircut. There will be no prom. No graduation. All the hours of community service you did will mean nothing, thrown away without a second of hesitation.

Oh well. There's next year.

But when next year came, there was nothing.

Oh well. That's fine. I'm not disappointed. People have it far worse than I do. I should be happy.

You're called into service as an EMT. You watch as a woman pleads with you, begs you to save her through raspy breaths, begs god that she'll get a vaccine if she can live just one more day, if she can just beat this sickness. Thirty minutes later you're loading her in a plastic bag. They've run out of body bags. This is the only way to prevent it from spreading.

Oh well. People die. I knew this when I signed up for that EMT course. The nurses have it way worse, working countless hours in pure hell. I can't hold a finger to their suffering.

Dad isn't visiting again.

Oh well. That's fine. That is life. I'm not disappointed.

Grandpa's dead.

Oh well. I don't cry. That is life. Everyone's suffering.

They scream and clap for you, "America's heroes, America's firefighters." "Thank you for your service!" "You're so brave!" Their words make you cringe. If only they knew how useless you really are.

Oh well. It's not like they care about me as an individual. It doesn't matter. This doesn't matter. Just say thank you, and move on.

The one of few things that made you happy in this world is gone. You'll never know what happened to him. Where he went. How he died.

Oh well. It's my fault anyway. I let him out of my sight for too long. This is what I get.

Twenty EMTs surround a drunk man who scraped his head. Only three surround the child he crushed. The child screams, the pillow soaked through with blood, never to walk again. The family *laughs*. They laugh as you carry the child to the ambulance. They snicker when blood coats the ground. They play off the cries of agony. "She's fine." They say. "*She's fine - she scraped her knee, that's all.*" You shout in rage and begin a march over towards the man - and then a gentle hand stops you - "I know. Let it go. Let it go."

Oh well. There's no justice in this world. Let it go. Don't puke. Let it go.

That song - that song that song that song that song that song - every time it comes on, you remember, you remember you remember you remember you remember you remember. You scream, as the past trickles in and you beg, beg beg beg beg beg for it to stop.

Oh well. It's a silly thing really. A song triggers me? Really? Am I really that sensitive? Am I really that weak?

The parrot screeches. You pass the clipboard to your partner, and collapse on the floor, as another man is dying in front of you, relying on you to help him. And all you can do is become a floor obstacle for the paramedics.

Oh well. That's fine. They don't trust me anymore, they won't let me do anything anymore, they look down on me now. I'm useless now. I'm lucky though, that they still let me hang around, that they haven't abandoned me yet. They're the only real family I have. I'm so thankful they keep me, even when I'm useless.

Russia is attacking Ukraine. People are dying.

I am not surprised. I am not disappointed in humanity. This is just how it is. Our hands are all stained in the blood of our hypocrisy, of our greed, of our fear.

You have permanent nerve damage. It's only going to get worse from here. But you're not eligible for disability. You're just stuck like this. Live with it. Your hand is shaking, breaking, crippling day by day.

..... Oh well ... that's life. I'm not disappointed.

According to the world, I deserve it anyway.

The Corona Voyage

Karar Zenki

On the Corona voyage,
Paranoia is the captain,
The tides are too high,
It's taking you on a rough ride,

Fear is its deputy,
Fitting the mind in a cocoon,
Just like the body,
Every face betraying the dread,

Panic is the pirate,
Who would go next?
Swell the number of the dead,
Leaving the senses hanging in the wild.

Long, Tiring Shift
Caleigh Hoerner

A woman comes home to her family after a long, tiring shift.
No words are said, just straight to the shower.
Straight to the shower to remove the germs,
to remove the stress
to remove the everlasting fear of "Will this continue?"
She gets out of the shower and makes dinner for her family, after her long, tiring shift.
She relaxes for the short amount of time she has, and she goes to bed.
She wakes up and gets ready for another long, tiring shift.
She gets in the car; she drives the 30-minute trek to her place of employment.
She walks in, clocks in, and immediately gets into costume.
One mask? No, two.
Only her scrubs? No. A disposable isolation gown too.
Goggles? Yes. Of course.
She must not let the germs in.
She must stay safe,
because if she doesn't,
who will keep everyone else safe?

Two Weeks to Slow the Spread

Rebecca Wils

Two weeks to slow the spread
Or at least that's what they had said.
Two weeks turned into two months
and two months turned into two years.
Time flew but dragged at the same time.
Learning nothing in school and losing contact with friends.
Stuck wondering when Covid will end.
Fear spreading as much as the disease itself.
Sickness overwhelming my family.
Slowly healing.
Masks making it hard to breathe in the hot summer sun.
But two weeks to slow the spread!
Or at least that's what they had said.
Quickly losing contact with friends.
Covid slowly ruining my school experiences.
The sport I have come to love, quickly ended before it began.
Hate spreading like wildfires.
Six feet apart.
That's how healing will start.
Two weeks to slow the spread!
Or at least that's what they said.

Pandemic Time

Grant Riddoch

794 days since the start
But it feels like both an eternity and a flash
The pandemic has changed lives
Even though it is coming to an end the impact is still huge
More than 10 percent of my whole life stuck in this
Just waiting to get out
But once we do people will always just look back at these times
Look back at them like a stain on a perfect white shirt
A blemish in the history
And a cut in the timeline
A huge portion of my life wasted
But not forgotten

The New Normal

Sydney Skimmer

The country that used to be united
has now fallen into a downward spiral filled with hatred
the country we once were is not the country we see
racism, rallies, and fighting for equality of our own rights and bodies fill the news every day
left versus right, black versus white, government versus our bodies
when will this end
it has been two years since the start yet it seems to get worse every day
why has our nation changed
when will we join together and become united again
we need to become the country we once were and when that happens,
the pandemic will be deemed complete

Infected with Peace

Jessica Horst

What if a pandemic infected society with peace?
Where we all came together as one,
And we as one came together as a whole

If a pandemic with peace were to transpire
We could speak with our actions
Bring this world to a better place
Rather than being a brutal fighter

March 2020

The world went grey
Left and right, black and white
Stores, restaurants, and roads were emptied
For a pandemic of peace is what I pray

We were infected with a virus of hatred
One which has not been cured
The community love has slowly faded
But I can assure, it coming to an end is not near

The Walls Are Falling Down

Amelia Kelly

At the start, it was a total change,
Deciding the lone volunteer to sacrifice themselves
To the dim and demise of the grocery store
Buying a little more of everything
“Just in case” the store wasn’t there tomorrow morning

But slowly, the walls started falling down.
Zoom calls turned into masked waves from behind glass doors
Dining room table meals shifted into take-out on park benches
Online shopping casually veered into the stores

And the walls continued to fall down
The cloth covering became optional in most places
Lovers met in person instead of sending desperate messages over IM
And finally, we were able to see each other once again.

From then, it’s been a constant question as to if the walls will continue to fall
Or if we will be forever trapped in this state of “normal”
Resumed, but not quite ever what it once was
But more recently,
With everyone promising the walls have been falling
It feels like even more we should be questioning these statements
It feels even like the walls
are
starting
to
build
once
again

When Will It End?

Rayahna Tryka

I looked out the window and saw the world flourishing
We were stuck inside and masked
And yet, the world did not slow down
The grass was thriving
The animals free and happy
The trees stood tall
The flowers bloomed
For there were no more humans in their space
We separated human nature from the natural world
And maybe that was for the better

But now the headlines are biased and ignorant
And I am tired of the news
When will it end?
There are days where I want to disappear
Everything seems to be back to normal
Except our mental health is worse than during the “pre-pandemic”
It's not normal for our anxiety and depression to be spiking
And for there to a stigma around reaching out for help
The world is more divided than ever
Perhaps the division is the true pandemic

Divided

Abigail Uhrich

Red and blue,
Some say opposites attract,
But in The Land of Liberty,
Opposites repel,
Repelling as far as the east is from the west.
If one stands in purple,
They are seen as weak,
Their thoughts and values are blades of grass in a forest of redwood trees,
But the forest is on fire.

Red and blue,
Neighbors pinned against one another,
Family discussions turned sour,
Friendships strained like a rubber band that has been stretched as far as it can go,
All over opinions on a piece of cloth meant to protect that same neighbor,
Over opinions on a vaccine and how it should be mandated,
Parents aggressively questioning school districts on how they are handling directions from
the state,
Seeming like peace and understanding will never be in reach.

Unintended Opportunist

Eric Monin

Six million two hundred eighty-eight thousand six hundred sixty-two,
Quite the shame,
That I happen to be the happiest I have ever been.

It's a distant guilt, I lost no one,
Only gained.

Death toll and friend count,
A positive correlation,
According to my statistics studies from home.

My comfortable home,
where I found myself, my passion.
I create art in my glee.

It did catch me once,
The dreaded malady.
Yet years later,
Here I am.
The happiest I have ever been.

The COVID Nightmare

Reese Wilkinson

Somewhere in a river lives a fish.
The fish knows nothing of the world, nothing of man.
The fish has the privilege of ignorance, a privilege I wasn't born with-

Privilege is a word tossed around in the media these days,
but what does privilege mean?
Privilege means having a free vaccine but choosing not to go get it, choosing ignorance over
sound logic.

What does logic mean? Logic is a way of receiving information.
Logic isn't what you want it to be. Logic is using your better thinking skills.
Logic is necessary.

What's necessary? It's necessary to be kind, to be compassionate, to be understanding and
to
Be a friend.

What does it mean to be a friend? Being a friend means not saying COVID once in this
poem.

The Final Goodbye

Anthony Mathews

Strength is something that cannot be measured
but your courage was always unmatched
The memories we had are forever treasured
From my life you were forever snatched

Your courage was always unmatched
as you fought through the battles of life
From this world you were forever snatched
The pain felt like a twisting knife

You valiantly fought the battles of life
Relieved of ache, you now soar the sky
Your loss feels like a twisting knife
I was not ready to say goodbye

The clouds make way as you soar the sky
Your darkest storms forever weathered
You smiled throughout your final goodbye,
for your strength cannot be measured

Ukrainian Sunflowers

Anthony Mathews

Unwelcome intruders abruptly arrive
The cries of families echo for miles
But a strong nation will always survive,
like the towering Ukrainian sunflowers

The cries of families echo for miles,
as they pour onto the freedom rails
Strong like towering Ukrainian sunflowers
The heart of a nation always prevails

They pour onto the freedom rails
In hopes of a swift return
The heart of a nation always prevails
For they will not let their country burn

Sunflowers of Chernobyl

John Wilcox

Tears
Diligently sifted
Sincere
from
Cynical

Watering seeds sown in despair
In hopes of a bountiful harvest
Healing
That kind of comfort that offers condolences beyond conventional communication

The sunflowers of Chernobyl
Spreading across the world
Calmly suffocating the onslaught of seasonal tragedy

The Art of the Detail

Jennifer Campbell, SUNY Erie Professor of English

The straw days of April
find me in the garage,
lugging vacuum hoses,
tubs of cleaners, chamois,
eager to free my car
from the crusted gray mats
winter put its hands
all over. The salt and stones
dusting the rugs. Scuffs
from kids' growing legs
on seat backs. Next door,
boys wrestle on the lawn.
A thumping basketball
is my soundtrack. The low engine
of insect noise not quite
tuned to the heat.
We have few tools
in the clean garage,
but I am my father's child,
wiping away brake dust,
the grime of age
and time that settles
when we aren't looking.
I shine and wipe, polishing
my car new again.
I am singing and long
to drive in the country,
ears popping down the hills
to the heart of the city,
early morning amid
festival setup, to then drive
eight hours to the ocean,
the wet surf drenching
the air as summer lasts
one hundred long days.

The Healing
Lexie Hillman

They say it is about over, but I still feel its presence
I still have the anxiety of hearing coughs in classrooms
I still look at that dreaded mask on the countertop
I still listen to the news
Better, but not gone

School is back in, but it is different than before
We are still separated from each other
We are still behind the curriculum
We are still suffering
Better, but not gone

Although it is still hard, I can feel the healing
I see crowds of people without worry
I witness headlines that are not talking about the same thing every night
I feel the anxious energy in the air clear out
We all are healing, slowly

The Surviving City

Anthony Mathews

Dust blankets the deserted city
Store fronts hollowed from fire
The brave stand tall, refusing pity
Submission will prove to be dire

Mothers, fathers, children alike
Clench to all they cherish
They must move quickly, begin their hike
Streets pile with the recently perished

But the prideful folk fear not the Red
They stay back and face their fear
Unknowing what lies ahead
The blue and yellow will persevere

Hope remains, the world watches together
The Ukrainian flag will fly forever

To All the Poems

John Wilcox

To all the poems never wrote
A thousand apologies for the interruptions impregnated inside the poet's throat

Aborted by procrastination
Exalt in the semantic emancipation

Hook of fear
Set you free my dear

Void of esoteric charlatans and moral purists
who suckle longly from the phallic jurist

So, Rest easy now little ones
as you lay wrapped in tears of remorse
The freedom to speak one's mind will circle back in due course