

BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN  
ORAL HISTORY OF COVID-19  
IN POEMS



BRIDGE THE  
DISTANCE: AN  
ORAL HISTORY  
OF COVID-19 IN  
POEMS



ANGELICA BRAATEN, ANNA J.  
SMALL ROSEBORO, ASHLEY

VALENCIA-PATE, BARBARA  
EDLER, BETSY JONES, DENISE  
HILL, DENISE KREBS, DONETTA  
NORRIS, SARAH DONOVAN,  
EMILY YAMASAKI, GAYLE  
SANDS, GLENDA FUNK, JAMIE  
LANGLEY, JENNIFER  
GUYOR-JOWETT, JENNIFER  
SYKES, KATE CURRIE, KATRINA  
MORRISON, KIMBERLY  
JOHNSON, LAURA LANGLEY,  
LINDA MITCHELL, MARGARET  
SIMON, MAUREEN INGRAM,  
MELISSA ALI, MO DALEY,  
MONICA SCHWAFATY, SCOTT  
MCCLOSKEY, SEANA WRIGHT,  
ALLISON BERRYHILL, ALEX  
BERKLEY, ABIGAIL M. WOODS,  
TAMMI BELKO, SUSIE MORICE,

SUSAN AHLBRAND, STEFANI  
BOUTELIER, STACEY JOY, SHAUN  
INGALLS, AND ANDY  
SCHOENBORN

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# INTRODUCTION

The idea of preserving the voices and experiences of teachers who navigated a new reality due to the COVID-19 global pandemic was the starting point of the project Teacher-Poets Writing to Bridge the Distance: An Oral History of COVID-19 in Poems. This oral history project emerged from a celebration of National Poetry Month in 2020 on Ethical ELA, a public website for teachers to read and write poetry and share and discover poetry lessons for their classrooms. Over the thirty days of April 2020, 50 teachers from 22 states wrote nearly 1500 poems.

After writing poetry online for thirty days together, several teachers noticed that this body of poetry held experiences and perspectives necessary to the historical record of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers' voices needed to be heard and documented. And so we proposed an oral history project to document the shared and diverse experiences that emerged through and around the intersection of writing poetry and teaching during

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this unprecedented pandemic. To offer agency and reciprocity to the process, we knew it would be important for the teacher-poets to interview each other for this project, so fourteen of the teacher-poets became teacher-researchers, facilitating the oral history interviews through the poems the teachers chose to share, poems that they thought best represented their experiences living and teaching during the early days of the pandemic.

This anthology offers readers the poems shared across the 39 collected oral histories: 166 poems. We extracted the poems from the transcripts to show the line breaks and stanzas intended by the teacher-poets. In the margins of the pages, the white spaces, this anthology also holds the meaningful connections and the sense of community that developed during the interviews where teacher-poets witnessed one another's lives.

The oral history interviews are available for public access at Oklahoma Oral History Research Program where you can listen to the teacher-poets' emotions, reactions, and insights elicited by reading their poetry. By doing this, revisiting poems written a year prior, teachers re-witness, with perspective offered only by time, the impact of COVID-19 on them as teachers and on education more broadly.

Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety were two of

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the most common reactions to the sudden closings of schools. Some felt the need to show their best face and attitude towards the chaos. While feeling uncertain of the future, teachers had to give their best for their students. Every school district had its own set of guidelines and procedures to follow during the pandemic. While some teachers were fully grateful and agreed with their state's rules, other teachers had to struggle with the decision-making that was taken in their designated schools. Inequity was a theme throughout the interview process, too. Teachers shared how many of their students were not given adequate technology and materials for the transition to online learning. Therefore, teachers had to figure out how to fulfill their students' and own at-home learning needs based on what was available. Some teachers shared how teacher-parent relationships developed through increased communication and support given during this transition while others lost touch with families and even students altogether.

In several oral histories and poems, there is an increase in self-care. Teachers shared how the pandemic helped them slow down their daily routines and focus on their mental and physical health. Writing poetry was therapeutic — the routine, the audience, the creativity. Many of the

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poems here are not about teaching at all. They are about being.

The poems in this anthology are arranged chronologically by the date they were archived. You can learn more about the teacher-poets in the section called “Teacher-Poets.” We hope you will bear witness to their lives through these printed words and then again through their voices and silences recorded in the video oral history interviews online at the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program.

SHAUN  
INGALLS



# THE PROCESS



SHAUN INGALLS

First one up, always.  
Find a pair of clean shorts and a t-shirt –  
nobody to impress during quarantine.  
Start the pot of Folgers – gotta prime the pump.  
It's an eight-cup day.  
Delete emails while the coffee brews.  
How much of one's life is spent pressing miniature  
trash cans?  
Okay, okay, okay, just a minute!  
Fill a travel cup and take the dog on walk #1 –  
lots of dog-walking during quarantine.  
Toast a bagel. Not really hungry, but I do it anyway –  
lots of unnecessary eating during quarantine.  
Sit down, alone, at the dining room table slash home  
office slash second  
grade classroom –

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no large groups dining during quarantine.

Listen to NPR and feel the frustration level gradually  
rise.

Click the X on that window and open a new  
document.

The calming drone of the air conditioner signals that  
it's time to write –

lots of time to write during quarantine.

# MOVING DAY



SHAUN INGALLS

Today I have to put the contents of 2019-2020  
into dozens of cardboard boxes,  
number them, put my name on them,  
and hope they find me again.

This double-wide box has seen things:  
puppet shows, musicals, lip syncs, poetry orations,  
standardized testing, open houses, prom night  
invites,  
observations, staff meetings, staff development,  
tears of joy, tears of frustration.

This year didn't end as planned.

The seniors didn't get to finish together.

The juniors didn't get to AP stress together.

We didn't get to sign our yearbooks together.

So, stop by next year and visit me.

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Take in a big whiff of that new-classroom-smell,  
and we'll try to make up for lost time.

# INCORPORATING MOOSES BY TED HUGHES



SHAUN INGALLS

The beast's temperament is an enigma,  
goofy howling while driving home on the first day.  
Moose sound the same, only a few octaves lower.  
The jig was up when he screamed and hollered for a  
couch rescue.  
Walking down the hallway, I raced to see what's the  
matter.  
House alive with worry and concern. Then his  
limber  
frame leaped into the air and onto the floor like an  
Olympic gymnast, manipulative monster.  
Is this how it's going to be?

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Lost forever in those mud-brown eyes,  
In the bushy white eyebrows that furrow and judge,  
the tilt of the head and slight flick of a too small pink  
tongue,  
forest of cotton snout tangles comically horizontal  
after a nap?

# GATHERING WORMS



SHAUN INGALLS

Grandpa held the red plastic flashlight  
with his left hand  
and shined it over the black earth,  
his little worm box in his right hand  
the green metal edges  
barely visible in the dark.  
Kneeling down I could see  
slimy brown bodies sticking out an inch or two.  
Quickly I snatched the slimy beast  
and felt the muscle pull back into the black loam.  
With the silver trowel,  
I scooped a column of earth  
under the worm  
to prevent its escape.

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The writhing and wrenching  
never stops  
until it burrows into the bottom  
of the worm box  
only to be seen again  
when pulled out  
to conceal a silver hook  
at the end of my line.



ABIGAIL M.  
WOODS

# COME WORSHIP WITH US



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

Do you ever wonder why congregations sing?  
Why even the most devout have a moment  
Of self-infatuation – an existential crisis  
– In the pit of a Sunday sermon?

My god, I am certain that even the most  
Ardent skeptic could be convinced of the almighty  
In the shoulder-to-shoulder GA parish,  
In the audience to a midnight worship.

When was the last time you felt God's presence?  
Stood face-to-face with the king-of-kings  
Competing with the holy vibrations of industrial  
Subwoofers and amps – a steeple for all and one

I am convinced that God is a bass drop.  
The first wave of a monumental night

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Baptizing the flock of sinners before it,  
Washing away the grime of a religious experience.



# ON ALICE PAUL AT THE SEAWARD-BELMONT HOUSE



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

“There will never be a new world order  
Until women are a part of it”

Alice Paul looks like my great-grandmother –  
Or more accurately, Mamaw looked like her.  
The white home-perm curls and flared nostrils  
Lips always pursed, ready to comment on  
Your posture or how one of the boys better  
Take her fishing or she was going to switch  
Their asses like when they were children.  
Eyes that dealt discipline on a silent platter,  
Alice probably avoided photographs if she could.

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She probably laughed with a wide-open mouth,  
Her head tossed backwards. She never missed the  
Chance to tell you her opinion. Mamaw, though,  
Was a different kind of feminist. The kind that  
Leaves her husband when he hit her, pregnant and  
Full of a life. I imagine her sailor mouth chattering  
Under her breath as she walked, belly and all, to  
The doorstep of her mother's home. She would  
Drink her red beer, and cut her friends hair until  
She had a beauty-parlor to call home – and there,  
She'd drink water. She raised four boys that weren't  
Hers – and it should have been five – because it was  
The right thing to do. She always made sure  
everyone  
Was fed and had a place to sleep. She slept in a bed  
On her own and married a man because he took  
pictures  
Of her instead of the mountains cascading around  
her.  
Alice Paul looks like my great-grandmother –  
Or more accurately, Mamaw looked like her.

# WALMART



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

“You  
will have  
to enter  
on the other  
side.” Pointing to the  
right. The man explodes.  
“Screw you” he spits at me. “It  
is city-mandated” *I am not  
your door-mat, I mean to say, I am  
essential, critical, at-risk worker.*





# FOR UNELAVNHI, THE GREAT SPIRIT



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

Before god moved into the Americas  
Built his white brick house and burned crosses  
In our neighbors yards, the Cherokee's worshipped  
Here. The rise and fall of the Appalachians,  
The colossal peaks of the Great Smokies,  
The plentiful and green gullies and valleys.  
There are still bones were my ancestors lay,  
Under your plantations and your highways,  
Under your malls and your domesticated feet,  
Are the flattened mounds of unrestful souls.  
In the spring, I imagine you can still hear  
Their stomps, their prayers, their turtle shells

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shaking

From their feet with the beat. The Cherokee's were  
Not meant to be sedentary. I think that's why  
I long for exploration. They had the earth to  
worship,

To wander, to love. I imagine if I laid down on this  
Grassy slope, the trees would stretch their  
Roots to my arms, hold my hands as they  
Washed me in the thick dirt of the Mother.  
This is where I belong – in the light of the day,  
Under the same skies my people once followed,  
But I will not stay.

From the massive oak trees who's century old  
Roots dig into the ground deeper than the  
Stakes of my tent could ever fathom, from  
The silver and turquoise fingers that plant  
My gardens and beg for them to yield their  
Peppers, from the crackle and pop of my kitchen  
When there are ten people between me and the  
Door. I can hear them

*Iyuno unelavnhi wadiyi nasgi nanahwunvgi,  
nasgi hawinaditly duyugodv nahnai.*

Translation:

If the creator put it there,  
It is in the right place.

# THREE-FOR-ONE



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

A laundry mat on wheels  
One side clean, the other side dirty  
An hour to school and an hour  
Back to mom's. Forty-five minutes  
To my bed and fifteen to dad's.  
I no longer live my life this way.  
The learning curve has taken awhile,  
But I do not need to hoard sweatshirts  
In my floorboard. I take my wallet in  
When I get home. I don't leave  
My life in the car.  
I no longer live that way.

I called it home for most of my life.  
A white brick building turned cream  
From years of red-dirt dust. Velvety  
Red carpets, a nursery, a hallway with

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A kitchen, three rooms for study, and  
A children's place at the back.  
I had, at one point, begged for  
My own, but when I finally moved  
Out, I left it there, in the bedroom  
Of a girl that once spent her Sunday's  
At service and her Wednesday's at group.  
I don't want my bible anymore.

I was always a water baby. Maddie  
Tells me this is because I am a  
Gemini but let's be honest, I just love  
The feeling of the creek rushing over  
Me. I love the campgrounds, the  
Fire roasted jalapeno hot dogs, and  
The overwhelming smell of sunscreen.  
We went on our own trip a few years  
Back. I realized it wasn't the  
Place that I loved so much,  
But the people. And the people  
Aren't the same anymore. Some got  
Divorces, and some got sober, some  
Had some kids and others left because  
They didn't. I was too young to  
Realize then that the creek was more  
Than a creek.

# EGYPTIAN RAT SCREW (OR, ERS)



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

Samuel slams his palm on the table,  
Roaring with his victory like a lion over his prey.  
Zach's body shakes with laughter, aggressively  
Rattling the table. This game, not life or death,  
Yet still so crucial to the livelihood of this moment.  
Richard is pouting, half-asleep on the couch.  
Logan is swirling the green apple wine in her glass  
As if there is a cheese that could pair with a jolly-  
rancher.  
She's watching the escalation unfold. Sammy,  
gloating, pulls  
His stack from the tabletop and into his deck,  
shuffling  
To get them all straight, and each of us lean back

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down

Into position. Sam flips his card and the chaos  
ensued, again.

Seven of clubs,

Two of diamonds,

King of hearts,

Two of diamonds.

My hand sends ripples through the table as it lands  
on its target –

Unobstructed. I grab my stack and laugh, staring  
Sam down.

As previously discussed, this is my game. Zachary  
cackled, “watch it,

Samuel, you’ll summon the beast.” He reached over  
to pat my head.

I start to defend myself from the accusations but the  
Red head in the kitchen is having none of it,  
screaching

“You have a scar from it on your hand, Abigail!”

She whips her body around the corner to stare me  
down

As if to say, “Abigail, be real here, you’re the most  
competitive person

I’ve ever met.” Flashing before my eyes, I realize that  
I am happier

In this moment than I have noticed in a while. Sam’s  
still throwing

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Taunts onto the wobbly coffee table, and the coffee  
table is

Questioning whether it will make it through  
another round of this

Ridiculous game.

These are the people I live for





# WHERE I'M FROM



ABIGAIL M. WOODS

I am from dogwoods,  
From tree swings and haybales.  
I am from crisp green rolling hills  
(Overgrown, full of life  
It smelled like fresh morning dew.)  
I am from the creek-side lawn chair,  
The rushing waters  
Whose rippling waves haunt my body  
Deep in my dreams.

I am from four-wheeler tracks and route-66,  
From massive oak trees and blackberry bushes.  
I am from the take-it-or-leave-it's  
And the five-days-a-week's,  
From sun-up to sun-down.  
I'm from a red-dirt diamond

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With stark-white chalk

And three chances to make it mine.

I'm from Sonic Drive-In's and Spook Light Road,  
Sunday service and catfish dinners.

From the bed of a white F-150, filthy and smiling  
Snow-cone victories

The bat my father kept from childhood.

In the catalogs under mom's bed

Three 3 weatherproof containers

Each labeled with

A child's name.

I'm from the homerun balls –

Indoctrinated in a younger generation –

Skills of a family tradition.

KIMBERLY  
JOHNSON

# ALMOST ASLEEP



KIMBERLY JOHNSON

pitch black dungeon dark except for  
his screen beam of scrolling  
against the haint-proof-blue headboard  
eyelids fluttering lazily to the sounds  
of drift-on-a-dinghy verge of the  
edge of a deep sleep forest  
where the gnashing of the  
terrible teeth of the wild things  
on the fringes of the wild rumpus begins  
with the whirring blur of a white noise fan  
feverish scritch-scratch circling of Schnauzer Fitz,  
feet-sheet-scratching to Shanghai  
rumble of thunder as we slumber under the  
refrain of pelting rain  
grumbling growl of Schnoodle Boo  
the king of all wild things

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who's snoozing too



# DETAILS OF SAPELO RIVER



KIMBERLY JOHNSON

your marsh and river at dawn and dusk  
ever-changing palette of brilliant hues,  
    a back I scratched on novice skis,  
arm I tickled casting lines, nets, shells;  
    you picked up the dinner check:  
deviled crab, steamed shrimp, fried fish,  
    and lulled me in a dock hammock as I listened  
for playful dinnertime dolphins,  
    an empty mollusk shell now –  
priced far less than all you've given.





# PAINT CHIPS



KIMBERLY JOHNSON

smooth sailing days of spring  
walking the blank canvas of  
the dirt road less traveled  
smelling summer squash seedlings  
and fresh-squeezed tulips  
ambling home for a front porch swing  
cup of chamomile tea  
steeped in fireflies  
and waterfalls



# BARNYARD CONCERT AT DUSK



KIMBERLY JOHNSON

stadium of tiered strains  
crickets getting on key  
off-key bleating goats  
sound-boosting rooster straining in  
heckling-cackles from the hens  
melodic symphony of songbirds  
grunty strumming backbeat pig  
headbang-drumming woodpecker  
string-section grasshoppers' lilting cadence  
high-trilling tree frogs  
windchimes ring  
porch swing chain keeping tempo

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as we sway  
to this cacophonous  
harmonious  
sunset serenade

ANDY  
SCHOENBORN

# SIX FEET AWAY



ANDY SCHOENBORN

There you are,  
posing in the tall grass,  
wearing a purple shirt made of silk,  
and looking, without knowing,  
at a version of your future self.

    In the present,  
I look into the hazel eyes  
of my eighteenth year.

    I was so sure.  
I was all-knowing.  
I couldn't wait to escape into  
the promise of  
adulthood.

    I took it all for granted.  
    We all do, I suppose,

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when we have nothing but  
time and dreams.

Now, at forty-four,  
in a time of quarantine,  
I see myself posing  
for a senior picture  
I never wanted and  
wonder aloud for my students.

What of their senior photos?  
Some wanted.  
Some not.

What of their prom?  
Graduation?  
Concerts?  
First kiss?  
Last dance?

Last  
chance?

What will they remember  
in the COVID-stolen remnants of  
a finish line called  
Senior Year?

I hope they find time  
to pose in the long grasses  
near where they live and  
capture memories like  
fireflies in a glass jar.

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I hope they don't  
take this time  
for granted.

Just because the world  
is on pause doesn't mean  
they won't look back  
on this time for the  
rest of their lives.

They will.

I hope, when they do,  
they are able to  
smile and laugh  
in the face of the thief  
that stole their inheritance,  
and do it, of course,  
from a safe distance —  
six feet away.



BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS





# EARTH DAY PRESENCE



ANDY SCHOENBORN

Shhh! Breathe. Be still. Enjoy. Silence.  
Seek benevolence.  
Chirping birds share songs and poems.  
Safe at home.  
Croaking frogs calling out their love.  
Voices rise above.  
A cacophony: Earth Day love.  
Stop and listen for sounds of Earth.  
Pause for a day – your right of birth.  
Seek benevolence. Safe at home. Voices rise above.



# I SEE YOU



ANDY SCHOENBORN

I see you, writers,  
bringing yourself to the page.

I see you, poets,  
unshielded,  
taking down walls,  
breaking barriers,  
and sharing pieces of yourself.

I see you, Glenda,  
in your words,  
your wisdom, and  
your wit. You amaze.  
You inspire. Thank you.

I see you, Anna,  
celebrating brothers,  
celebrating verse, and

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celebrating others. You embolden.

You spark. Thank you.

I see you, Michelle,  
taking in NYC,  
through a window, and  
writing beautiful words. You shine.  
You impress. Thank you.

I see you, Jennifer,  
sharing your words,  
in verse and prose,  
in nurturing comments. You hearten.  
You motivate. Thank you.

I see you, Donnetta,  
writing in Texas and  
lending your gift  
to the page, for us. You influence.  
You shine. Thank you.

I see you all,  
Stacey and  
Mo and  
Susie and  
Shaun and  
Allison and  
Alexa and  
Malachi and  
Paige and  
Robin and

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Denise and  
Gayle and  
Kim and  
Margaret and  
Padma and  
Jennifer.

For all those named  
and those I missed,  
I see you all.

Unshielded,  
taking down walls,  
breaking barriers,  
and sharing pieces of yourself.  
I see you, poets.

Bringing yourself to the page –  
I see you, writers.

And, I see you, Sarah,  
creating spaces for words,  
inviting others to be brave,  
speaking to the writer  
in each of us, leading the way,  
encouraging us to embrace our  
own sense of #verselove.

Thank you,  
thank you,  
thank you,  
a million times,

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thank you for showing  
us how to stretch our wings,  
so we too might believe  
we can fly.



SUSAN  
AHLBRAND

# THE OTHER SIDE OF NOW



SUSAN AHLBRAND

The slowdown that came with COVID 19  
Was a much-needed respite if you know what I  
mean.

The cause and the reason—to avoid death and avoid  
the spike—  
were not positive but the outcomes are things that I  
like.

At home with my family, hanging out and having  
fun

Instead of in the car and constantly on the run  
We play games and play cards and cook meals  
together

We all go outside to simply enjoy the nice weather.

I'm a teacher so I'm still working and making some

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money

For those who are not this work stoppage is not  
funny.

All day, I sit at the table staring hard at a screen  
Hoping to still reach each student, each confused,  
antsy teen.

All around our house are others tapping into to  
Wifi

Two college students, one high school sophomore  
and two more teachers do try.

We're all trying to grab normal, to move forward in  
school

While trying out every kind of new technological  
tool.

My husband is the designated shopper because he  
hates to stay down

Each day he finds a reason to journey out into the  
town.

We've cooked more at home this month than all the  
previous years

And those of us over 21 have tried all sorts of new  
beers.

Daily schedules are wonky, interaction is low

We try to wear face masks wherever we go.

Sweatpants and no make-up have become quite the  
norm.

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Closer bonds with our families we've tried hard to  
form.

Jigsaw puzzles we've worked and games of euchre  
we've played

I know we will look back on the memories we've  
made.

These times have been scary, the sacrifices have been  
great.

But it will all be worth it, of that one can't debate.

We'll flatten the curve, we'll keep a number from  
dying

All the while trying to figure out when the  
politicians are lying.

On the other side, when we're back to "normal"  
we'll see.

We were given the chance to become new you's and  
new me's.

What really matters is certain to shift

Back into the chaos, I'm sure many will drift.

But this is our chance after we had no chance but to  
stop.

To reclaim a life that leaves us feeling on top.

Should we keep going, going and going some  
more?

Should we keep competing with others, trying to  
keep score?

Should we sit on the bleachers at ballparks on

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Sunday?

Should we walk right on by neighbors with nothing  
to say?

No, we should slow down and live life at our own  
pace.

We should worry about us and not others to race  
We should keep the Sabbath holy and spend time  
with our clan

We should visit with others, make that our main  
plan.

Corona forced a slowdown, billions of dollars  
have been lost

But we can use this as a time to find things that don't  
cost.

Find things that do matter, make us smile and feel  
loved.

To help those around us and praise God up above.

On the other side of this thing, whenever that  
comes

Don't go back to normal, don't return to being bums.  
Hold on to the good from this time we've lived  
through

And come out as a much better version of you.



# STRANGERFRIENDS



SUSAN AHLBRAND

Alone in a full house  
Still in a chaotic day  
Haunted by the tickle of thought . . .  
I become inspired by  
a challenge  
a mentor  
an inspiration  
    by a strangerfriend  
    I put aside the needy students  
I steal attention away from a house full of kids  
I ignore my husband of 25 years  
to prod my brain, my heart, my memories  
for a creation in response.  
    Oddly, I open up to a room of strangers  
sharing thoughts and feelings

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that I wouldn't share here in the home  
where I am sheltered in place.

I am awed by the vulnerability others show  
the raw sharing of abuse  
the honest telling of fears  
the open storytelling  
the beautiful describing  
with strangerfriends

I've often been skeptical of stories  
of people finding "friends" online . . .  
gaming, discussion boards, tinder.

Not anymore.

The safe culture  
cultivating creativity and sharing  
the honest, positive, specific feedback  
affirming  
encouraging  
complimenting  
from strangerfriends  
in these uncertain times  
full of anxiety and instability  
void of connection and activity  
the one constant has been  
#verselove.

bringing comfort and wisdom  
and inspiration and confidence  
this room has been



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cozier than being huddled up  
under a fuzzy blanket on a couch.

I will forever be grateful  
for the Godsend  
of strangerfriends.



# ONE MORNING



SUSAN AHLBRAND

I woke up one morning  
about six weeks in and,  
as in all things, the newness had worn off.  
    the fear and uncertainty of the stay-at-home order  
usurped by complacency and comfort.  
    the scattered, unsettled feelings of teaching  
remotely  
replaced by confidence and routine.  
    the frustration of staring at a screen  
offset by the absence of disruptive students.  
    the wistful longing for evening activities  
overrun by the appreciation of home being the  
default.  
    Right now,  
my life is not in danger  
neither are the lives of any of my loved ones.

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Right now,  
my job is not in peril,  
nor are the jobs of any of my loved ones.

So, it's easy for me  
to concern myself with my daily rhythm.

Our "new normal," our new rhythm  
shines a light on many things we were  
missing out on that we didn't even realize . . .  
family time at home with board games  
and euchre and family movie night.  
More home-prepared meals than in the last three  
years combined.

Arts and crafts and yardwork.  
Books and podcasts and exercise  
Daily mass online and regular time for prayer.  
Yoga and time for soul-searching.

The days will never be long enough again  
to fit all of the things that I now know I love  
There won't be enough hours  
to squeeze in the few chapters,  
the walk and podcast,  
the meal prep and clean up  
bookending a meal that holds lively conversation  
after a full day of work.

How can we return to our "normal" jobs,  
our "normal" rhythm,  
our "normal" evenings

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when we found so much now  
that we want to keep?

And then there's this . . .

I'm writing about my "new normal"  
while others toil in dangerous hospitals  
and work in understaffed nursing homes  
and mourn the loss of loved ones.

I feel petty and superficial to worry about  
what I want my days to hold.

Because, like all things,  
the newness will wear off.



# LIVING IS BETTER THAN DYING



SUSAN AHLBRAND

Living in a house with a first-year teacher  
helping her navigate unfamiliar waters  
with a boat that just changed to a paddleboard

Living in a house with a 25-year veteran math  
teacher  
whose nickname is Graber  
“How do you do this?  
“I don’t want to do that.”

Living in a house with a high school sophomore  
whose first varsity baseball season got benched  
his socialization has been stripped.  
Learning from a computer has never been his thing.

Living in a house with a college freshman  
who got yanked back home mid-way through

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carving out and embracing his independence.

Living in a house with a college junior  
who turned 21 in quarantine with no bars to go to  
nowhere to flash that ID

Living in a house of Collective Discomfort  
we can't worry about me in a time of we.

Together the six of us navigate newness  
knowing that . . .

Living in a house  
is better than dying alone  
because Covid locked out  
loved ones.



# A TEACHER MOM MIGHT SAY (DURING COVID 19 SHUTDOWN)



SUSAN AHLBRAND

Things I did so naturally  
a few days ago  
make me take pause . . .

    touching my nose, my mouth, my eyes.  
turning doorknobs,  
pushing/pulling doors open in public places  
walking through a store grabbing whatever I wanted

    Now it's needs not wants that are the focus  
and even needs can't impose their will.

    As cheated as we feel about missed experiences,  
As confined as we feel about being encouraged to

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hunker down at home,  
At the root of those emotions and the fear that  
hangs over them like a drape,  
we know these changes are vital.  
Or, at least with each passing hour,  
we are sobered by reality.

We needed to slow down  
We needed to quit cramming our calendars with  
activities  
We needed to stop pushing our students to learn  
more, more, more  
and to move beyond things they were  
developmentally prepared for.  
We needed to bring God, Faith, church, community,  
fellowship, concern for others  
back into the center of self.  
We needed to be reminded that home is a haven,  
that we don't need to go, go, go all the time.  
We needed to cherish our country and our  
wondrous sites

and not constantly yearn to travel abroad

I hope to never again take for granted  
hugging my loved ones  
shaking hands at the sign of peace  
dipping my finger into the holy water font  
perching in bleachers watching high school kids  
compete their asses off

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welcoming my son home after baseball practice  
following my favorite teams on ESPN  
browsing through a store picking up wanted items  
standing in front of a class of captive yet captivated  
students

Seasons have been cancelled  
Graduations  
Weddings  
Funerals  
First Communion  
Retreats  
Birthday parties  
Family vacations

All of the things that  
reflect our freedoms,  
show our love  
celebrate our achievements.

Our circles have shrunk  
and will continue to shrink  
like Laura Ingalls  
in a cabin the woods  
just family  
and self  
and thoughts

We have to embrace  
this drastic shift  
play board games

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play cards

read books

watch movies

enjoy homecooking

knit

cross-stitch

work jigsaw puzzles

In a time of social distancing,  
we have the chance to connect  
to grow more intimate.

Oh, the irony . . .  
distancing draws us closer.

GAYLE SANDS

# UGLY FEET



GAYLE SANDS

I hail from a family of tiny women with tiny feet—

Size five feet are “cute”.

(Size five shoes look silly;  
take no room at all.)

Huh!

I am not tiny.

My size nine narrows

are definitely

Not.

Cute.

My feet define ugly—

Really. Look up ugly in the dictionary.

My foot picture is there.

Long-boned, purple-veined.

Toes bent in all the wrong places

Toe-knuckles fighting their way toward the tops of

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my shoes.

Toe nails not worthy of polish.

My little piggies stay home because they are  
embarrassed.

These feet belong on a prehistoric beast,  
(Thankfully extinct.)

My husband says  
That if he'd met my feet first  
He wouldn't have asked me out.

Truth hurts  
Ugly feet.





# DEAR FIFTEEN



GAYLE SANDS

Sit down, sweetheart.

You are not going to BELIEVE

the things I have to tell you!

I am going to just sum it all up—

You are going to make more mistakes

than you can even imagine.

But those mistakes are going to turn you into a very  
interesting senior citizen.

You will cuss. A lot. Probably more than you  
should.

Those plans you have?? HA!!!

Plans are made to be changed.

It will take three colleges to get your BA in a major  
you won't use and date a much older man and find  
out that's no good and grow up and move away and  
have a good job you hate and meet a guy that your

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mom hates and marry him and have one child and  
then twins (not a smart move, by the way) and, oh,  
yes—there's a recession that messes everything up  
and you get around to teaching at forty and you  
finally have a job you love and then your kids will  
grow up and move out. You will be a very bad  
housekeeper.

And all of this required a lot of cussing.

Even before 2020.

*(We won't even talk about that—you wouldn't believe me,  
anyway.)*

So here is my advice, fifteen. Take it step by step.  
Every decision and every mistake you make  
will teach you a lesson.

Learn from them.

Mix it up.

Make a different mistake every time.

*(You were really good at the mistake thing in the  
seventies.)*

Throw in a few good decisions now and again  
just to keep it interesting.

*(That guy your mom hated is a keeper, by the way.)*

Love your people, get a lot of pets, and keep your  
weight down.

Your knees will thank you.

And a couple of cuss words will always clear the  
air.

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You have a heck of a ride ahead, fifteen...



# STILL SOME WORK TO DO



GAYLE SANDS

I remember the time

One summer...

A student rode up on his bike as I worked in the yard

He was dishevelled, grimy, jeans shorts and too-small t-shirt,

a grin wreathing his face.

He threw his arms around me in a sweaty hug.

“Hey, Miss Sands! How’s it goin’? You’re not going to believe this—

I’m reading a chapter book!”

And I was. My heart swelled just a little bit.

He had been almost illiterate, a seventh grader at the alternative school where I taught.

I remember the time...

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I thought that If we had accomplished this  
breakthrough,

Anything was possible. This was the reward we all  
seek.

I told him how proud I was.

We chatted about the book for a moment, then  
he looked over his shoulder, hopped on the bike,  
and,

calling out, "See you later!", rocketed down the road.  
I chuckled and shook my head. Exactly what I was  
used to from him.

Two middle schoolers ran up, panting  
"Did you see him? Which way did he go?  
That's my bike—he stole it!"

I remember the time...  
I realized that there was still some work to do...

# HUGS



GAYLE SANDS

The last day of school was stolen from us.

No sigh of relief, no wave to the bus.

I couldn't hug them.

I taught from afar, a world in between.

No real connection, naught but a screen.

I couldn't hug them.

No farewell ceremony to close with.

Worse for them than for me, I suppose, but

I didn't hug them.

They are gone to high school;

all the months we spent

dissolved, so many lessons unsent.

I can't hug them goodbye.

Hunkered in our houses, away from those we  
know.

Scurrying through stores, get in, get food, then GO!

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If I see a friend, I wave, because

I shouldn't hug them.

My friends stay in touch with emails and such.

Better than nothing, but I so need their touch.

I want to hug them.

My daughter lives two hours away.

Our phone conversations happen every day, but

I haven't hugged her.

I talk to Mom on the phone every week.

As her mind fades, it's my presence she seeks, yet

I can't hug her.

On a walk in town, a student appeared.

"I've missed you", she cried, arms out, running near

I set aside my fear...

And I hugged her.



# ORIGINS



I was born  
From Dick, Jane and Sally  
in perfectly pressed clothes,  
with clean blonde faces,  
obedient dogs,  
fluffy cats.  
Look! Look, look, look!  
Oh, how I looked.  
I learned the power of the alphabet from Dick and  
Jane.

*The Borrowers* were my comforters.  
Arriety, Pod, Homily, and Hendrearry Clock.  
Even their names were borrowed, not quite right.  
When I lost something,  
I knew that they repurposed it in their Under-clock  
home.  
The thimble a coffee cup, the spool a bedside table.

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The loss stung less, then.

I learned to say goodbye to things without regret.

Golden Book Encyclopedias were my intellect.

Multi-volumed, shiny, primary-hued covers.

A-Ar, W-Z. Faithful friends.

They never threatened, always informed.

The covers lost their shine with overuse

The coating peeled off like sunburned skin.

I made sure to put them back on the shelf in order

So that I could pull the right volume out when  
needed.

I learned the power that knowing things offers.

My mother's Nancy Drew books  
fueled my dreams of adventure.

Oh, how I wanted to be Nancy,

Multi-talented, skillfully shifting gears in her little  
blue roadster

(What does she drive in today's renditions?)

As she careened down the mountain,  
brakes failing.

I'll bet she didn't even break a sweat.

And she was always right.

She was superwoman. She could do anything.

Nancy taught me to use my mind,  
that risks were worth taking.

My grandmother's Gene Stratton Porter books  
took me to the Indiana swamps—

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*Freckles, Girl of the Limberlost, Laddie.*

Lives in 1910 were so simple, so hard.

Survival was at a premium;

Nature's beauty and savagery lay just outside your  
door.

I learned gratitude from Gene Stratton Porter.

I was born from words.

Sentences and paragraphs built me from within

Poetry, biography, adventure, mystery, romance  
drew me out into other worlds.

I live there still.

STEFANI  
BOUTELIER

# CRIER



STEFANI BOUTELIER

I was never a crier  
But my heart keeps breaking  
Quarantined from truth  
The marginalized  
The oppressed  
Opportunity spectrum  
The gap is widening  
    I will not cry  
    Kids whose safety was in the four walls  
Of our classrooms  
Food  
Insecurities  
Health  
Instabilities  
    Don't cry  
    Trolls

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Hatred

Bipartisanship

Petty

Disbelief

I cannot believe it

Unemployment

Stimulus

Terminally ill

Last goodbyes

Via facetime

Hold it in

Try not to take it personal

The constant hate

Disregard for humanity

Dis-empathy

Distant from reality

I cry

# ADDICTED RECOVERED



STEFANI BOUTELIER

Smoking and polluting lungs  
    Chewing gum and popping bubbles  
    Hustling ganja on the corner  
        Dancing through grass at a  
concert  
    Sniffing snuff, stardust mind  
        Smelling snapdragons on a walk  
    Eyes glued to the dark web  
Writing poetry for self or the masses  
    Sipping each hour to gain freedom      Sit-  
ups, push-ups, moving to gain muscle  
    Pills deadening the pain  
    Meetings, meditating to awaken  
    Posting positives to public media

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Learning, connecting through virality

Ignoring signs and hiding feelings

Talking through the emotional labor

Chomping, vomiting,

overconsumed

Moderating motions

through balance

Judging self through actions

Shaming self through guilt

Coping to ignore realities

Coping to understand possibilities



# MIRROR MIRROR



STEFANI BOUTELIER

By London and Stefani Boutelier

noifcelletn ym nfiw qniondb evol I ,IAM  
gnivieceb ed nno Ji fndf zi ebizIWOD  
nHf ,hquvl llszym exptm nno I fndf zi ECI29U  
nHf ,leat I won wonz f'nzob noifcelletn EHT  
?nno I fndf EE2

yzercz to zefon beqdlf nfiw nno I  
kool ylev nfiw beuznem zi EMIT  
zeifilidizzob zzeljimid zblon romim HOAE  
EACH mirror holds limitless possibilities  
TIME is measured with every look  
I can write flipped notes of secrecy  
SEE what I mean?

THE reflection doesn't show how I feel, the  
UPSIDE is that I can make myself laugh, the

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DOWNside is that it can be deceiving

MAN, I love dancing with my reflection

\*Originally published in Autumn 2020: *Fine Lines*  
29(3), 53.

\*Golden shovel poem from “Reflection” and  
“Backward Bill” in Shel Silverstein’s *A Light in the*  
*Attic*

# RHYTHMIC RUN



STEFANI BOUTELIER

ready, set, run  
earbuds, forte in my ear  
legs in adagio  
Ain't Nothin But a Gangsta Party  
beats shuffle my arms forward  
shoulders pop with caprice to a  
Bidi Bidi, Zoom, or Waka  
    andante sways my core into cadence  
Won't Back Down  
humidity pulling my hydration out  
Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger  
the rhythm near my drums  
builds a tempo in my stride  
Blinding Lights  
on the Otherside  
an ensemble of emotions and goals

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sweat with every roll of the heel  
the longer I pace with the lyrics  
the deeper my thoughts pitch away  
from the mad, Mad World  
escapism through a runner's high  
even when my feet feel like  
Titanium  
...I Run the World

JENNIFER  
GUYOR-JOWETT

# A CROWNING IN MAY



JENNIFER GUYOR-JOWETT

I am a child,  
one bead of a decade,  
chosen for my knowledge  
of memorized prayers  
and early reading ability  
of words and their sounds,  
the shapes they make  
falling easily from my mouth  
yet untested before crowds.

I stand small,  
surrounded by long-limbed children  
tree trunk torsoed,  
older by years  
(seven if we're to count).

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Light filters through,  
a time lapse of  
Virgin Mary Blue,  
wings of angel gold  
slanting across this prayer pilgrimage,  
snapshots  
projected on synapse screens,  
the click, click, click  
    of the spent film roll slapping  
against the spool,  
each click  
a flicker of memory.

I hold in place,  
await my turn,  
the voices before me  
exact,  
assured.

I know my Hail Mary  
I am full of Grace  
But the Lord is not with me  
The words jumble  
Blessed art thou  
All eyes on me  
Who art in Heaven  
A prayer mix  
Unhallowed be thy name.

My crowning crucified

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in blood red words  
and mortification nails,  
the sour vinegar remains on my tongue  
to this day.



# {POEM-ING}



JENNIFER GUYOR-JOWETT

There is space between the stanzas,  
a spilling of words.  
Often, when I yearn to hear myself,  
I wander between them,  
draw breath from their souls.  
I carry their glimmer in my hands.



# BETWEEN TWO SELVES



JENNIFER GUYOR-JOWETT

The first time I held my sons  
    o in  
march  
e five years later  
    the multitudes of the world  
    the cacophonizing  
sounds  
the echoing  
answers  
    reduced themselves to  
just  
    the sanctuary  
of  
        two

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an entire world  
between us  
every molecule and  
atom  
every heartbeat  
drum-thrumming  
every solitary  
thread  
of our  
existence  
held  
together  
between two  
Selves.

# REQUIEM MASS



JENNIFER GUYOR-JOWETT

In this cathedral of our world,  
we honor the dead.  
The relentless waves have stilled,  
a retreat on bended knee,  
a threnody.  
We no longer need their crashing beat.  
The winds come to final rest,  
harboring inside organ pipes  
a lament.  
We hear no more their measured breath.  
The earth's hum has paused,  
its ancient choir silenced,  
an elegy.  
Its voice sounds no more for us.  
The fires doused and extinguished,  
a dissipation of the dying,

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a funereal hymn.

We heap all on its pyre.

Our voices chant.

Dies Irie

Echoes of the haunting.

Dies Irie

Our voices expand.

Dies Irie

Our own dirge.

MAUREEN  
INGRAM

# "COMPASSION IT"



MAUREEN INGRAM

compassion it.  
My bumper sticker  
implies and explains,  
who I am,  
what I try to do,  
what I believe.  
Each of us is hurting  
in some way,  
big or small.  
Love deeply,  
meet their eyes,  
laugh together,  
desire to love, and  
to be loved.  
Work hard,  
with passion,



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do justice,  
seek to know,  
be curious, and  
wonder.  
Travel widely,  
and see,  
how wrapped up in one another  
we really are, and  
really should be.  
Take action,  
even tiny steps,  
fall on your face,  
get up,  
go again.  
Give space,  
reflect, and  
write.  
compassion it.



# MAGIC HAPPENS



MAUREEN INGRAM

Poetic inspiration,  
waiting  
each morning,  
for me to discover.  
An enchanted stone,  
glistening,  
in the morning light,  
for me to hold and rub and ponder  
throughout the day.  
I let my mind absorb the mystery of the invite,  
fascinated, curious, mesmerized,  
followed by  
space  
to wonder.  
That's how magic happens.  
April days floated by

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alongside, inside, around, between, and about,  
inspiration,  
tapping something deep within,  
stirring me,  
nudging me,  
stretching me  
in new directions.  
I have marveled at the journey,  
nuggets and insight found,  
surprising visits to time past,  
traveling to the edge of places I still did not dare to  
go.

The charm of your comments  
finding light and sparkle in my verse,  
hidden messages revealed,  
illuminating my writing,  
welcoming.

That's how magic happens.

The glow and beauty of your poems,  
your openness and revelations,  
how they captivated and soothed,  
appearing like angels,  
letting me know you, as  
loving, familiar spirits.

Your words  
carried me to new worlds,  
gave me courage to wander there, too, and

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provided a glorious shelter-in-place.  
A wonderland of poetry shared by you,  
this community of teacher writers,  
connecting me to you, you to me  
creating a lustrous weaving of  
written dreams.

That's how magic happens.

Today,  
it is fitting that  
there is nothing but grey skies  
and so much rain,  
tears from nature,  
where I am.

I am in mourning  
that this month has ended.

I'm on my own now.

Yet, I know,  
that's never really true.

Future mornings,  
I will find again  
magic stones you left behind,  
to hold and rub and ponder.

I will treasure.

That's how magic happens.



# ARE YOU SLEEPING?



MAUREEN INGRAM

Bug-eyed, wide-awake, 3:46 a.m.  
I am thinking through our words  
Again, and again, and again.

Why do I care so much?  
Why do I wrestle like this?  
Why do I feel so frustrated?  
Why does it matter so much?  
Why does it wake me up?

Bug-eyed, wide-awake, 3:46 a.m.  
I am thinking through our words  
Again, and again, and again.

If a child isn't learning,  
don't we have to change  
the way we look at it

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the way we work at it

the way we are set up for it?

Bug-eyed, wide-awake, 3:46 a.m.

I am thinking through our words

Again, and again, and again.

We make plans.

We set goals.

We call meetings.

We offer prescribed supports.

We meet the letter of the law.

Bug-eyed, wide-awake, 3:46 a.m.

I am thinking through our words

Again, and again, and again.

We want the system to work,

the child to fit within,

rather than

bending,

turning,

stretching

to meet the child.

Bug-eyed, wide-awake, 3:46 a.m.

I am thinking through our words

Again, and again, and again.

I'm not sleeping.

Are you sleeping?



# THERE'S A HAND



MAUREEN INGRAM

There's a hand sticking out of the closet,  
Fingers curled, reaching, grasping,  
The breath is faint, labored, forced,  
What moves in the dark, thrashing?

There's a hand sticking out of the closet,  
Which side of nightmare is worse –  
Only a hint of what is emerging,  
Or trapped within dark and cursed?

There's a hand sticking out of the closet,  
A brave, fearless detective  
She chooses to look within the dark,  
To explore new perspective.

There's a hand sticking out of the closet,  
Followed by giggles and pants  
Just like Lucy in Narnia, she's  
Determined to take the chance.

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There's a hand sticking out of the closet  
Breaking out, coming back to us,  
Watch how isolation, dark, and scary  
Meets daring and resilience.

There's a hand sticking out of the closet,  
Freely choosing the unknown,  
She knows deep and dark is also free  
There is much magic at home.

DENISE KREBS

# DAD



DENISE KREBS

sometimes symphonies  
remain unfinished  
a long, long time ago  
he was 43 years old  
the devil's only friend  
    the day the music died  
he was singing  
bye bye  
too many kids to feed  
too many emotions to weed  
bye bye cigarettes  
bye bye vodka  
    before they married  
his widowed bride  
was blind to  
all the minor keys

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in which he played  
his childhood  
a telling overture of the whole  
rhythm and blues opera  
what would an  
abusive alcoholic's  
magnum opus  
be anyway  
maybe it was the  
seven kids lost in space  
trying not to misstep  
bad news on the doorstep  
    they turned out nice  
not into vice  
stayed out of jail  
tried not to fail  
cute at all costs  
not too many lost  
to dysfunction with alcohol  
    one  
when promoted to chp captain  
asked mom  
watched him on the stage  
hands clenched in fists of rage  
do you think dad would be proud yet

Note from Denise about the poem: Stacey Joy's  
prompt was multiple-stepped but doable. I loved

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that. It was still my first week, and I wasn't too confident. This poem was healing for me. In addition, Stacey's prompt has inspired me to write other similar poems over the past months. (For instance, the Amaud Arbery poem for September's Quick Write.)

# IT'S A GOOD FRIDAY JUST TO SAY



DENISE KREBS

Incorporating William Carlos Williams' "This is Just  
to Say"

This week started with a parade I  
Witnessed. Shouting and waving my palm branches  
have

Given me hope. Too often I've eaten  
Of this desire, dreams for the  
Future, broken again. Grapes and plums  
Crushed into sour wine that  
Is poured out and wasted. Were  
You informed of this in  
Heaven before you agreed to the

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Plan? Heaven must have been an icebox  
The moment the plan was devised and  
Executed. Which  
Brings us back to you  
Here now getting lead-studded lashes. Were  
You tempted to split the earth and let them fall in?  
Probably.  
Crown of thorns, 'My-God'-groaning, but saving  
Some bit of hope after the forsaking for  
A fish-laden breakfast  
On the beach. All to forgive  
Us, the world, villains, sinners, trespassers, me.  
Sour sponge dripping vinegar they  
Gave to relieve your pounded nails, pounding head?  
Were  
You aware that your godforsaken cries would  
become delicious  
Victory over the grave, so  
We would be able to say, 'It's Friday, but sweet  
Sunday's coming,' and  
Our scarlet sins could become so  
Clean like fire and snowy cold

Note from Denise about the poem: This poem was  
written on Good Friday. I liked the way it just rolled  
off my pen. It made me feel powerful.



# HAIKU



DENISE KREBS

in these virus days  
increased layers of litter  
greet and expose us

Note from Denise about the poem: Day 18 – and Day 53 of the staying at home orders for me. I think it was about the time we started to all wear masks. Now it's been over 200 days, and we're still wearing and littering masks. It is a time of feeling exposed. The cases here are doubling and even close to tripling what they were earlier during the pandemic.



FOUR THINGS I'D  
SAY TO PEOPLE  
WHO ARE  
AFRAID OF  
THEIR SPICE  
CABINET



DENISE KREBS

1 – I used to be too, using cinnamon and basil and oregano and salt and pepper. When I felt exotic I'd add a pinch of cumin and a smidgen of chili powder. Nothing louder than what you'd find in a steaming bowl of chowder, though.

2 – Then I got older and bolder and experimented. I always loved to eat savory, flavorful dishes, so why

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not recreate them in my kitchen? I can try. And try I  
do now because you see...

3 – My spices are becoming a touchstone for me. I  
look in my cupboard and see so many jars of hope,  
flavors brimming, ideas bubbling, whole leaves,  
pods, seeds, some crushed and powdered, as the  
hours are in my life. My time is limited in this place,  
in Bahrain where the flavors are exquisite and the  
spices are pennies. My time is limited on this earth.  
My time is limited in the kitchen, So,

4 – I want to use every hour, every recipe, every  
moment, every meal to the fullest. To the tastiest. To  
the joyful hope of a new beginning.

Note from Denise about the poem: The number  
1 silver lining for me during this pandemic has been  
cooking. I was never much of a cook before. You  
asked us to write a spoken word poem. I wrote this  
that day: “When I saw your prompt today, I laughed  
aloud imagining for a moment what would have  
happened if this was a first day prompt. I would have  
run for the hills! Perhaps forever and a day climbing  
back under my “no poetry” rock. Thank you for  
waiting until Day 26! Today I felt it was a fun  
challenge instead of sending me packing.”

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*An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here:*

*<https://open.library.okstate.edu/bridgethedistance/?p=209>*



# WRITING WITH #VERSELOVE



DENISE KREBS

Thank you, mentors  
Thank God for writing  
Writing poems  
Writing hearts  
Hearts of longing  
Hearts of healing  
Healing traumas  
Healing brokenness  
Brokenness once unspoken  
Brokenness poured out in poetry  
Poetry of triumph  
Poetry of laughter  
Laughter in knowing  
Laughter in tears

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Tears of renewal  
Tears of cleansing  
Cleaning from old hurts  
Cleansing like therapy  
Therapy of self-awareness  
Therapy of celebration  
Celebration of spoken words  
Celebration of written words  
Words like treasures  
Words like flowers  
Flowers of magic  
Flowers of moods  
Moods to relay  
Moods to wander  
Wander not aimlessly  
Wander to ponder  
Ponder hindrances  
Ponder existence  
Existence of whispers  
Existence of universal truths  
Truths to craft in form  
Truths to craft freely  
Freely speaking our hearts  
Freely reading one another  
Another day passed  
Another poem written  
Written in quiet



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Written in embrace  
Embrace our new friends  
Embrace our sure future  
Future of hope  
Future of #verselove  
#Verselove sustains  
#Verselove restores  
Restores  
Sustains



# AN ODE TO #VERSELOVE POETS



DENISE KREBS

Wow!

Powerful!

Beautiful!

Lovely!

To my friends:

When I write these words it doesn't mean

I don't love your poems,

that I'm not truly touched.

I am.

To myself:

But come on, Denise,

that's all you write.

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You are 62 years old.

Learn some precise language  
for speaking about what you mean.

How about using a thesaurus?

Try...

striking

compelling

convincing

aced spelling

revealing

healing

appealing

got me dealing with my own feelings

reflecting

connecting

respecting

collecting

wisdom from you, my mentors

exposing

imposing

disclosing

composing that closing

With your words

my soul you're jabbing

my heart you're stabbing

my mind you're grabbing

my eyes I'm dabbing

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Your poems are cathartic  
for the arctic  
sea in me  
reminding me of open wounds  
yet to be restored when  
given your remedy

Note from Denise about the poem: Finally, I thought this Blitz poem said a lot about what had happened over the month for me about how important the community who had read my poems had become. It was healing and comforting during a difficult time to laugh and cry with these special people. It also is a shout-out to Glenda Funk who taught me about the Blitz back on Day 2, Glenda, who I met the month before during the Slice of Life blogging challenge and had encouraged my participation. (She still remains a faithful reader of my blog on the Tuesday Slice of Life stories challenge. What a gem she is!)

STACY JOY

# THEY HAVEN'T YET



STACEY JOY

They haven't yet heard their mamas wailin'  
When their daddies got caged no chance for bailin'  
"Don't understand, ain't done nothing wrong!"

But skin too black and mind too strong

They haven't yet gone to the Negro schools  
Where white folks be callin' them nasty fools  
Young church ladies try their hands at teachin'  
On Sunday evening after pastors done preachin'

They haven't yet been beaten and kicked in the  
streets

But they seen hatred ridin' behind white sheets  
White men breedin' their power and hate  
In a country where nothin' ain't never been great  
They haven't yet stood in line to vote

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Rights and equality ain't even been wrote  
Their own children haven't yet been born  
In a nation where they'll forever be scorned  
    They haven't yet died while trying to live  
They had only one smile and laugh to give  
They had only one hand and hope to hold  
They had only each other to love and behold.



# THE GOLDEN SHOVEL POEM



STACEY JOY

What was life like BEFORE  
This pandemic thought PUTTING  
Us in isolation might bring FORTH  
Kindness? Are we to BLAME  
Can we ACKNOWLEDGE  
Or consider THAT  
Our collective hatred and ABUSE  
Would have consequences? God DOESN'T  
Like ugly, people ALWAYS  
Say. But what may COME  
FROM  
Our solitude and shelter is AN  
Embracing and gratitude of the beauty OUTSIDE  
An unquenchable desire to discover our SOURCE

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Of peace and love. SOMETIMES  
We need silence and stillness. WE  
ABUSE  
Others beyond repair but we abuse OURSELVES  
To God's despair. Go inward and examine yourself  
MENTALLY  
Give your mind and soul an EMOTIONALLY  
Uplifting message. Sing, dance and find a  
PHYSICALLY  
Healing and strengthening practice. Rest assured,  
SPIRITUALLY  
You are covered in God's grace and mercy. Use your  
isolation to FREE  
YOURSELF

# FREE WRITING



STACEY JOY

Writing without restraints  
The freedom to go with my own ebb and flow  
Knowing my words will land  
In the safe spaces of your hands  
Fearless and bold you say I am  
But I still hide and seek myself, my story  
Writing with you  
Unleashes more of me  
Showing me how to be proud  
Unafraid to reveal a few cracks  
Some big gaping holes  
That I gently fill  
One poem at a time  
    Grateful for my struggles  
My obstacles and issues  
My blessings and joy

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They strengthen and sharpen me  
Grateful for poetry, poets, and you!  
“This is where  
Floating rainbow hearts  
Ascend to the ceiling”

# WHERE I'M FROM



STACEY JOY

I'm from "Put your hands on your hips  
And let your backbone slip!"  
From my mother's strong legs and thick thighs  
To wide smiles and dark brown eyes  
I'm from four generations of freckles and moles  
To "Stop combing your hair so much and maybe it'll  
grow."

I'm from Gloria and Jay  
Both graduates of U.C.L.A.  
I'm from playing school and wanting to teach  
To walking on the sink to get things out of my reach  
I'm from Are You My Mother?  
To Are You There, God? It's Me Margaret  
I'm from creating a hidden reading room in a linen  
closet  
To card-table tents and Barbie campers

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I'm from a big yellow house on a hill in "The  
Dons"

To pool parties and Slip 'n Slide scratched knees  
From backyard baby showers and Christmas Brunch  
To classy Bridge players and domino dads talkin'  
trash

I'm from Hopscotch and ladders on the side of the  
house

To a daring first kiss that made me shiver and spit

I'm from Nestle Quik's chocolate bubbles floating  
in my milk

To Gogo Burgers and Tito's Tacos with guacamole  
From burnt cheese toast and El Patio Mexican  
restaurant

To sardines and crackers after Saturday morning  
waffles

I'm from Nana's Monday night Russian Bank and  
Pokeno

To Mommie's badminton matches on Sunday  
mornings in the gym

I'm from "Drive safely and don't stay out too late"  
To cheerleading at Friday night football games and  
Shakeys after

From "You will not be driving for 2 more weeks"

To senior prom and graduation parties past curfew

I'm from "Mommie, I think I'm pregnant"

To sedation at a clinic plagued with regrets

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I'm from growing up and moving out  
To dorms, apartments and owning my condo  
From married with two children and too many jobs  
too young  
To divorced, grateful, and balanced  
I'm from the suffering of my mother's and father's  
cancer  
To the resurrection of hope and joy after grief  
I'm from struggle, suffering, injustice, and  
inequalities  
To taking a stand, sitting in, and marching onward  
I'm from knowing my ancestors had it harder than us  
To trusting that God is still the same today and  
always  
I'm from poetry, chalk, protests, and music  
I'm from breath and spirit  
I'm from love.

MELISSA ALI



# BLACK HAIR LEGACY



MELISSA ALI

## AFRICAN LEGACY

Regal

Crown

Glory

Dreadlocked

Braided

Twisted

Dhuku

Gele

Hijab

## AMERICAN LEGACY

Covered

Scarfed

Burned

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HILL, DENISE KREBS, DONETTA NORRIS, SARAH

Permed

Hatted

Wigged

Weaved

Altered

Always a source of contention

Bald headed

Nappy headed

Chicken headed

Snap back

Peasy

All over the place

Looking like straw

Looking like you been in a fight

Looking a hot mess

### LEGACY

The 1960's changed the narrative for many

Afros

Blowouts

Cornrows

Braids

Dreadlocks

Twists

Naturals

### MY HAIR LEGACY

Both my grandmothers

Maternal and paternal were biracial

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COVID-19 IN POEMS

Not because their mothers were in love with white  
men  
But because Black women are always the collateral  
damage of American society  
Both wore their hair natural  
Long  
Wavey  
Thick  
What is known as “Good Hair”  
Both my grandmothers said they married the darkest  
man they could find  
so they could have  
“Brown nappy headed babies”  
My mother’s hair  
The opposite of her mother’s  
Short  
Crunchy  
Thin  
But most of the time it was natural  
And how I love her sandy, pink sponge roller laden  
hair  
It was the late 80’s when I became conscious,  
Or what is now called WOKE  
One part, foundation (that is how I was raised)  
Another part, Afros classes in college  
But mostly becoming the mother of a chocolaty,  
curly haired baby girl.

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A baby girl that needed to see her reflection not only  
in my eyes,

But also in my appearance.

So I excised the colonizer's deeply rooted  
indoctrination that blonde straight hair is the golden  
standard of beauty.

GONE are the blonde highlights I'd worn in my hair  
since high school

Tryin' to look like Miss Clairol

Gone is the over processed burnt up lifeless hair

Tryin' to look like Gwyneth Paltrow

Gone was the mindset that my hair needed to be  
tamed, controlled, and seasoned

Like an enslaved African in the 1600.

My hair

My crown

My glory

Big

Puffy

Coiled

Tangled

Wild

My daughters, now two

Their hair

Their crowns

Their glory

Devoid of chemicals, heat, weaves and dyes

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Full of self love,

Hair love

Woke

A new

BLACK HAIR LEGACY



# DAUGHTER OF



MELISSA ALI

My name is Child  
I am the great-granddaughter of Celestina,  
Mamá,  
Miss Celeste  
Who was a survivor and an epic matriarch  
Obeah woman blood  
Mamá refused to be the white men's collateral  
damage  
Having to continue to work for her rapist, she gave  
her baby his last name  
Always referring to him as "Dat white Bastard"  
Her fingers spoon fed me castor oil  
Her accent thick only knowing Spanish and  
Spanglish  
But what she did best was cursed as the soles of her  
slippers

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That she threw across the room and upside your  
head with accuracy

She taught me to mind my own damn business

My name is Little Girl

I am the granddaughter of Esmeralda Victoria

Essie

Miss Essie

Mamácita

Who was a survivor and a bad-ass matriarch

Blood stained hands

A Garvey-ite

Third world, poor, with eight children

There was nothing she couldn't do

Cook, bake, sew, garden, crochet, hustle

Mother to everyone in need of love for 102 years

But what she did best was feed the souls of the  
hungry

She taught me that family is not made of blood alone

My name is Missy

I am the daughter of Ida Celestina

Mother/Ma/Mommy

Mrs. Porter

Auntie Ida

Nani

She is a survivor and compassionate matriarch

The blood of Panama, Black Nurses, Black Power,  
and white distain



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Violated, battered, and hopeless

She rose like a phoenix from the ashes

BSN-MFCC

Like her mother before her, opened her heart and  
doors to all

But what she does best is inspire others, and laugh

She taught me how to feel authenticity.

My name is Melissa

I am niece, cousin, sistah, community daughter, and  
auntie

Gurrrrl

Cousin

Auntie Missy

Melissa Ann

We are survivors and family

Some blood some not

Cooking, eating, drinking, laughing

Consoling, crying, cussin, and caring

All woven into the tapestry that is one

Ride or Die, bring a gun to a knife fight

But what we do best is be present for one another

They taught me how to love and accept the people  
you call family

My name is also Sister Ali

I am the daughter of revolutionary matriarchs

Harriet Tubman

Ida B, Wells

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Toni Morrison

Dr. Francis Crest Welsing

We are survivors and kindred spirits

Blood in blood out

Fighting, writing, living, and breathing for the  
betterment of our people

Heavy hearted, laborious, and traumatizing work

God's warriors, working from the soul

Ripping off the bandages so we can heal

But what we do best is live in the truth

They taught me one voice, one action, one heart can  
become a movement

My name is Melissa Ali

# DESENSITIZED



MELISSA ALI

The last time I cried for a Black person shot by the police was when 12-year-old Tamir Rice was killed by Officer Loehmann in 2014 for playing in the park.

The last time I felt rage for a Black person shot by the police was when 23-year-old Korryn Gaines was killed and her five-year-old son Kodi was shot by Officer Royce Ruby over a traffic warrant.

The last time I felt pain permeate my soul for a Black person shot by the police was when I watched Officer Yanez's bullets penetrate Philandro Castile, fatally shooting him during a traffic stop in front of his fiancée Diamond, her four-year-old daughter, and Facebook live.

The last time I felt disgust about the death of a Black person under the remand of the police was when 28-year-old Sandra Bland allegedly hanged

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herself in a jail cell with no physical evidence (finger  
prints, method, or video surveillance) that proved  
suicide.

From 2015 to 2020, 5,000 Black men, women, and  
children have been killed because of implicit bias,  
racism, fear, and anti-Blackness that is pervasive in  
the policing of this nation.

Numbness flows through my veins with the  
coldness of the Antarctic Ocean.

Heart broken,  
unable to grieve,  
desensitized,  
and traumatized.

I can only manage to study these deaths with the  
eyes of an analyst.

I can tell you the exact moment George Floyd took  
his last breath.

I can give you a minute by minute recall from the  
time Breonna Taylor was killed until they removed  
her from her home.

I can tell you why it took 74 days for the police to  
arrest the murders of Ahmaud Arbery.

But what I cannot do is shed a tear,  
feel any pain,  
or muster up any anger for the unjustified deaths.  
I am numb.  
I AM SO NUMB,

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That I too  
Can't breathe.

TAMI BELKO

# DANCE PARTY FUN



TAMMI BELKO

We dance with no technique  
purely wild abandon,  
there's really no mystique,  
head-banging, body rockin,  
chasing a mad shimmy  
across the kitchen floor  
Alexa belting music from ... the 80's?  
No worries,  
my kids can groove  
raised on a variety of smashing tunes —  
Rock n roll, alternative, and musicals swoons.  
We can dance and sing  
“Mama Mia” & “Bohemian Rhapsody”  
Without pause, quite amazing actually

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We dip and skip and sash shay away  
push those blues to another day  
Without a doubt, we are crazy family.



# LISTEN FOR YOUR BEAT



TAMMI BELKO

Verse one

Sweet lullaby

whispered in soft alto

A caress on your baby cheek

Listen for your beat

Verse two

Jubilant two step rhythm

Splashing in puddles,

Bounding down streets

Playing in allegro

Listen for your beat

Verse three

When you feel disconnected

and dissonance bellows

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I will always be your counterpoint

Listen for your beat

Verse four

Let me soothe your worries

In a sweet cadence

When the world sees you as an  
interlude, off pitch, staccato ...

I will always love your vibrato

Keep listening for your beat

# TO MY DEAREST DAUGHTER,



TAMMI BELKO

College online means indulging in  
homemade lasagna every day if you'd like,  
no skimping on the mozzarella cheese, baby!  
and there's copious amounts of red wine, the kind  
you  
can't afford at school, not  
that I'm encouraging excessive drinking, but still ...  
It's more satisfying to drink with family  
Remember, this too shall pass  
No, you aren't in Kansas anymore, but  
pancakes taste better with chocolate chips, you're  
welcome, there's a can of whipped cream in the  
fridge,  
no judgement here

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Look on the brightside,  
there's a gassed car in the garage and  
the keys are right where you left them  
Never fear, where ever you go, that's where you are,  
because there's no place like home.

# HOW TO COME UNDONE DURING COVID

## 19



TAMMI BELKO

1. It begins with a steamy mid morning shower, scalding my skin, standing in swelling water ankle deep. I curse the clogged drain and stagnant water.
2. Organize my shoes, organize my sweaters (which I'll need until June), organize my sock drawer. Maybe I'll find the lost ones.
3. Wash my hands, stare at the bleeding fissures. Repeat.
4. Listen to 90's Grunge music from dead composers on repeat. Yeah, "I got a real complaint."
5. Pull the thread on my sweater.

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6. Obsessively check my email for a response about manuscript submission. Think, “Is there anybody out there?” Check query tracker, check submittable. Check my email again. Convince myself I’m not a complete failure.

7. Use the app on my phone to track the dead.

8. Plunge shower drain, yank out strands and strands and strands of hair. Curse. It is all mine. I’m sure of it. What’s worse than isolation? Going bald during isolation.

9. Wash my hands, stare at bleeding fissures. Repeat.

10. End the day with a heavy glass of red wine. Watch bleeding fissures. Count the dead. Pull the thread. Make a note to call the plumber.

KATE CURRIE

# NOW WHAT?



KATE CURRIE

What's next?  
Always moving  
Obsessed with progress  
Agonizing over next steps  
Never relaxing  
Fearing stagnation.  
    Slowly,  
Stress,  
    Snowballs.  
    Stop.  
    Breathe.  
    Enjoy the moment.  
Enjoy the students.  
Enjoy the work.



# MOM, I CANT SPELL IT



KATE CURRIE

Even when I try!  
Really, its too long  
Can you spell it again?  
M-E-R-C-E-D-E-S  
Every day, I practice  
Dyslexia wont sever the link.  
Each time it gets easier  
Slowly, I cement the link.

\*\*\*

A name that is a the link  
Between a grandmother  
and granddaughter  
that share  
a passion

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for education,

a love

for music,

an enthusiasm

for hard work.

One is here

and one is passed

But the name connects us

beyond the divide.

# “THE MOST GOOD”



KATE CURRIE

Do the most good  
everyday.  
Do the most good  
even if it is small.  
Do the most good  
even if you're alone.  
Do the most good  
when you feel strong.  
Do the most good  
when you feel lost.  
Do the most good  
despite the pressures.  
Do the most good  
despite the stares.

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Do the most good  
because you can.  
Do the most good  
because if not you,  
then who?

MONICA  
SCHWAFATY

# IT EMBRACES ME



MONICA SCHWAFATY

Here is the place that reminds me that it is time to  
get to work  
whether it is beautiful or gloomy outside  
whether I feel tired or energized  
A small desk with a comfy chair, my office  
A computer sits on top  
Waiting for me to start  
It has become one with the desk  
    It is a simple desk, nothing fancy  
But it is much nicer than the one in my classroom  
It welcomes me every day  
I spend more time here now than anywhere else  
It never gets sick of me  
And maybe I should hate it  
But I don't

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it sits facing the ocean  
what else could I ask for

This desk, my office, has become my classroom  
it welcomes my students, my kids  
it's where we laugh and keep the bond alive  
it's where I realize how much I miss them  
it's where we go on a tangent and engage in deep  
discussions  
it's where my kids amaze me

It is an unassuming desk, and it looks cold and  
distant  
That's misleading, though  
It has become my haven  
It's where I'm becoming a writer again, after so many  
years  
of holding it in  
the words storm out  
This desk  
It embraces my inner feelings, dreams, and desires,  
and  
It keeps them safe until I'm ready.





# RITUAL



MONICA SCHWAFATY

Coffee in bed  
Courtesy of my fiancé  
“Quarantine is not so bad”  
Reach for my phone  
Facebook, Instagram  
Twitter, the news, email  
#Verselove  
Read it  
Dissect it  
Self-doubt  
“Maybe, I’ll skip today”  
Refocus  
Read  
Grateful for the early writers  
Blown away by their talent  
Brain at work

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More coffee

Yoga time

What a treat

One may think I've forgotten

But that is not the case

My brain is at work

Yoga feels great

I feel more capable now

Energized, I get ready

Brain secretly at work

More coffee

Time to work

I turn on my computer

Grades

Google Classroom

Google Meet

Maybe today will go better

Teach

Break

Teach

Break

Teach

Break

Today is not better

Sick of virtual teaching

Parents

Students

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It's never-ending  
Brain still secretly at work  
Last cup of coffee  
I'm exasperated  
    Empty cup  
My brain reminds me  
I need my refuge  
I need my haven  
I need my escape  
I'm ready  
    Sipping hot tea  
I start typing



# ANXIETY



MONICA SCHWAFATY

Anxiety creeps in  
An incessant cough takes over  
It'll be a mess  
I'm not prepared  
How do I use Google Meet again?  
What if a student acts out?  
How many will show up  
Does that mean  
I'm a bad teacher  
Urgh...I miss being in the classroom  
This is not teaching  
I miss the connection  
When is this going to be over?!  
    It wasn't so bad  
It was actually quite fun  
Google Meet, I love you

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I loved “seeing” MY kids  
The connection is back  
We are a “family”  
Some were quiet  
Others were cheerful  
Some were sleepy  
Others ready to make jokes  
One had Rex, his guinea pig  
Who knew? In 8th grade?  
An unexpected guest  
but simply adorable  
Anxiety is gone  
Cough is better  
Excited for tomorrow

WHY SHOULD  
YOU  
PARTICIPATE IN  
THE #VERSE  
LOVE  
CELEBRATION?



MONICA SCHWAFATY

ONE- Because even though your self-doubt makes  
you hesitate,  
later you'll be glad you did it.

TWO- Because you can. Because you want to.  
Because you love poetry.  
Because you NEED it.

THREE- Because as you share your writing, a

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loving and supportive group gently embraces you. Their comments help you gain the confidence you so desperately need. These fellow writers/poets make you feel safe enough to take risks. You finally let go of your fears.

FOUR- Because it gives you a purpose. You look forward to it every day, and it helps make the mundane daily tasks a little less boring. You cannot go to bed without writing your poem. No matter how tired you are. It becomes a daily ritual. It allows you to stop and breathe.

FIVE- Because it helps you see the world anew. It connects you to your own and everybody else's humanity. It reconnects you to the writer you left behind decades ago.

SIX- Because the poems become a source of comfort and normalcy in a time when absolutely nothing is normal. It becomes a much-needed outlet, a haven you didn't even know you needed.

SEVEN- Because it gives you an opportunity to look back. You share memories, revisit events, and realize things about yourself you did not even know or had forgotten. You share some of the poems with your loved ones and you bond even more.

EIGHT- Because as you share the experiences that have defined who you are, you find your voice.



# ME



MONICA SCHWAFATY

It haunts me  
penetrating my soul  
leaving me in anguish  
making me feel hollow  
longing...  
Always there...  
The first thing in my mind when I wake up  
The last thing in my mind before I fall asleep  
The one thing that wakes me up in the middle of the  
night  
wanting to scream, to run away  
I cannot escape it  
It's around me, it's within me  
It consumes me  
It is me



# INFECTION



MONICA SCHWAFATY

Stay inside for my own protection  
Stay safe in self-isolation  
It's only been a month  
No one talks about it  
Because it isn't easy to admit  
It's only been a month  
Quarantine is a prison  
It's a slow demolition  
It's only been a month  
It is happening everywhere  
Does anyone care?  
It's only been a month  
There is no escape  
How much more can I tolerate?  
It's only been a month  
Quarantine is meant to stop the spread

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But it fills me with dread  
It's only been a month  
The abuse is an infection  
flourishing in this condition  
It's only been a month  
How much longer can I endure?  
For I see no cure  
And it's only been a month!

SARAH  
DONOVAN

# THE CHAIR CALLS YOUR NAME



SARAH DONOVAN

The chair calls your name to write again.  
The blank page awaits. Sit. Begin.  
Fingers speak stories, a writer's trance.  
Ache. Radiate. Enough for today. Stand.  
The blank page awaits. Sit. Begin.  
Craft words from trauma, love, sin.  
Ache. Radiate. Enough for today. Stand.  
Nurture the body that held your hands.  
Craft words from trauma, love, sin.  
Move beings into spaces to face fears.  
Nurture the body that held your hands.  
Mountain. Bridge. Warrior. Child's.

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Move beings into spaces to face fears.  
Fingers speak stories, a writer's trance.  
Mountain. Bridge. Warrior. Child's.  
The chair calls your name to write again.





# COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS



SARAH DONOVAN

Where do the fireflies go  
when the dark skies  
extinguish stars,  
when tyrannical winds  
rattle mighty crowns  
and branches reach  
for the ground  
to save their leaves?

Where do the fireflies go?  
They speak the language of light  
synchronizing flashes  
to defend, to warn, to attract,  
thriving where they were born  
at the margins of ponds and streams

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near standing water,  
shallow depressions  
in forests and fields.

Where do the fireflies go?

They're feasting on worms, grubs,  
slugs, and snails,  
immobilizing their prey  
with toxic schemes  
sucking out the entrails  
to fortify their kin.

Where do the fireflies go?

They are planning a revolt to strike  
down street lamps and porch lights that filter  
their radiance, to shatter the glass jars that suffocate  
their wings, to plant flowers full of pollen and nectar  
to fill summer dusk with  
synchronizing flashes of hope  
when the winds subside.

# SANDS OF TIME



SARAH DONOVAN

city blocks and ramps of streets  
lanes of paths welcome bare feet  
and powder blankets for miles of heat  
i look at sand that way  
but now winter powders cover dredge  
winds of cinder and ashes spread  
so many things I would have said  
but sand got in my way  
i've walked the sands toward dreams  
cut my toes on hidden glass schemes  
it's sand's forgiveness that I seek  
the hourglass of time, a rhythmic beat  
and soft landings on an oceanfront beach



# WHERE I'M FROM POEM



SARAH DONOVAN

I am from wastebaskets  
from Johnson & Johnson's talcum and Comet  
scouring powders.

I am from the bedrooms of plywood and glue,  
the bathroom of mildew and dripping faucets,  
the dining room of picnic tables and benches  
with scratches and knots of battles and laughter.

I am from the rose bush  
with temperamental blooms.

The magnolia tree  
whose teacup blossoms I remember  
as if they were my own palms.

I'm from Cream of Wheat packets  
for breakfast and

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french toast out of the skillet

for dinner.

I am from Skippy and Corky

skulking late to Mass

and Mother's Day breakfast at McDonald's with  
placemats

and from vacuum hums in the middle of the night.

I am from "go to confession" and "help your sister"

and "Islands in the Stream."

I'm from Poppin' Fresh after concerts.

I'm from Chicago and Collodi,

lasagna and Steak-umms.

From Papa, taking on Capone's goons

immigrant, educated in shake-downs. and alleys.

From rosaries of wood and glass and wire

wrapped in fingers,

resting in drawers,

hung on nails

waiting for prayers.

I am from long arms, blue streams in wrists

that have harmed and hugged.

I am from

the branches that scratch and knot.

Palms up, fingers nimble

I am from

the blossoms that cradle hope.

BETSY JONES

# SUN THROUGH WINDOW



BETSY JONES

view from my back porch  
view from my kitchen window  
window that frames green grass and tall pines  
window that captures the remaining blooms of  
camellias, lilies, and azalea  
azalea blossoms dried like deflated balloons  
azalea blossoms in a makeshift vase, a green cup  
cup caked with flour and sourdough starter  
cup in the sink, on the counter, by the bed  
bed unmade (nothing new)  
bed dark and cool, calling me to nap  
nap on the couch (normally reserved for weekends  
or holidays)  
nap denied (zoom meetings and google hangout



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classes)  
classes for homebound students: misplaced  
modifiers, author's purpose  
classes for this amateur breadmaker and misplaced  
teacher  
teacher-dreams of unfinished lessons and unruly  
students  
teacher without a classroom (just a dining room  
table)  
table set with nice dishes, repurposed for online  
instruction  
table strewn with notebooks and to-do lists  
lists of student essays to read  
lists of house projects and cleaning priorities  
priorities reframed, units and standards re-aligned  
priorities reordered, time no longer measured in  
semesters or periods  
periods of calm and peace and gratefulness  
periods of worry and anxiety and panic  
panic-baking: pear and goat cheese galette, tahini  
chocolate chip cookies, yogurt flat bread  
panic-cooking: shepherd's pie, spinach pesto  
lasagna, chicken enchiladas with green sauce  
sauce pans stacked high, cheese crusted on plates  
sauce simmering on the stove, garlic and onions  
season the house  
house-bound, relishing the long hours reading a

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book or sewing a blanket  
house warming in the afternoon sun  
sun casts shadows across the lawn, squirrels chitter  
in the trees  
sun sets behind the neighbor's house, a pink glow  
glow of porch lights line the street  
trees stand guard in the night

# THE GOLDEN SHOVEL



BETSY JONES

*In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.*

–“When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer,” Walt  
Whitman (1867)

In the cloudless dusk  
the International Space Station appears. A  
mystical and perspicuous event. Eyes  
moist with anticipation and allergies and awe. A  
deep inhale of  
night-air, cells fill with oxygen, the act of respiration  
both a magical act  
and a biological fact.  
From a back porch in Nowhere, Georgia  
time expands, and I occupy the same space as

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astronauts in orbit, connecting  
to thousands of eyes that trace the same arch from  
southwest to northeast.

Time contracts as the twinkling dot moves swiftly  
and smoothly over my roof line. As I  
look'd up through the perfect space between the  
oaks and the pines,  
up beyond the bats that pirouette and swoop, I  
follow the satellite until it disappears  
in the east, behind the Berhl's tennis court. I hold my  
breath, trying to hold this  
perfect moment for a few more seconds. The  
silence broken by the shouts and yelps from the  
Pickleball game. A final glance  
at the yard as the darkness descends,  
the blue gone from the sky. The evening's first  
stars appear, the sentinels of explorers, sailors, and  
poets alike.

# I AM FROM



BETSY JONES

I am from Childcraft Books  
from Bisquick and Dial soap  
I am from the “other Georgia”  
red clay, gnats, and cicadas  
I am from sweet onions and lantana, peanuts and  
daylilies,  
the citrusy floral perfume of tea olive trees  
I’m from front porch swings and droopy eyelids  
from Robert Edward Jones, Jr. and Traci Lynne  
Hutchison  
I’m from the short-tempered and the story-tellers  
from “dark thirty” and “sit up straight”  
I’m from Advent wreaths,  
silver and gold ornaments on the Chrismon Tree  
from “all is calm, all is bright”  
I’m from Ocilla Vidalia Leesburg Moultrie

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(30 miles from anywhere else you'd rather be)  
lacey cornbread, streak o' lean-streak o' fat  
From my parents' first meeting  
(new teacher orientation,  
homophone icebreaker,  
engagement ring hidden in a pocket)  
The dress my grandmother wore—with a peplum!—  
for her first Ray City date with “that Jones boy”  
on the walls lining the upstairs hallway,  
on the mantel above the fireplace,  
on the ledges and shelves of my mama's kitchen  
the faces of aunts and cousins, grandparents and  
uncles,  
brothers and vacations and long-gone pets  
I am from these crinkled eyes and round chins,  
these posed and candid moments,  
this love and legacy stored behind glass

# BORROWED LINES



BETSY JONES

Say we never leave our house again  
Say we continue to mask and sanitize and worry  
Say we plan our shopping trips like conquering  
generals

Say the tightness in my chest isn't panic  
but a respiratory infection  
Say the dining room table remains my office,  
no longer a place for  
full plates and  
empty glasses and  
shared stories

Say we keep making bread and slow-simmered  
sauce  
Say we take afternoon walks and drinks on the

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porch

Say we sleep in and take naps and stay up too late

Say we never move to Birmingham,  
never fix your family's house

Say we forget our dreams of new lives  
of old neighborhoods turned hip  
of Venezuelan food trucks or Indian kabobs  
of day drinking in Avondale  
of winter mornings at the bookstore

Say we never meet our niece  
Say we collect and share our milestones on Zoom  
and Facebook  
Say we delay taking your dad to Greece (for yet  
another year)

Say we never watch a movie in a dark theater,  
never watch a play or concert or comedy show  
Say we never go back to the beach,  
white sand and salt waves and sweaty beer cans gone  
Say we watch the world end from our couch,  
from the end of our bed  
not with a bang but with a whimper

Say we never buy a house, never root this nomadic  
half-life  
Say we never have kids, never adopt or foster  
Say we spend the next decade and the next one after  
that, just us

*Say, It doesn't matter. Say, That would be*



BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS

*enough. Say you'd still want this: us alive,  
right here, feeling lucky.*

Inspiration: "The Conditional" by Ada Limón,  
(the last stanza in italics are her words)  
<https://poets.org/poem/conditional>

SUSIE MORICE

# I AM COVID



SUSIE MORICE

I came on silent feet,  
slipped underneath your door  
lay lazy on the floor  
waiting.  
You soaped your hands,  
mopped and scrubbed  
it down the drain,  
or so you thought  
to stave the strain,  
my novel presence there;  
yet, weaseled in the corners  
I scratched and clawed,  
brazen, thirsting for a flaw, I hung  
and ripped inside your lungs, infected,  
knotted, left your song unsung,  
finished you,

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I slithered on.

In years to come  
they'll mark my day  
and build a wall,  
carve all your names  
on miles of marble,  
a pall will fall  
across the land,  
a marker left:  
the COVID Wall.

# TO FORGET NEVER



SUSIE MORICE

I remember ...

we held *these truths to be self-evident*,

matters of fact —

*it was like this.*

Certainty. Bold and bent with conviction,

declared, trusted that our house was built

with stones of exacting might,

treasured trusses of truth —

“I saw it with my own two eyes!

Counted with my own ten fingers!”

Our house shifted, suddenly sagged,

drafty, cleft in the corners,

window panes smeared

with a heavy impasto

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of doubt,  
a trompe l'oeil,  
a sleight of hand,  
rendering a different truth,  
countering logic, papered in toxins,  
dripping pathogens down the wavering walls.  
Now when I remember —  
the text in my left hand,  
my other on my heart —  
the mere act of recollection,  
carries a new weight,  
a sacred rite,  
as if having been there,  
as if bearing witness,  
as if forgetting  
promises the house will crumble.  
I write to forget never.

# COCKTAIL HOUR



SUSIE MORICE

I need an elixir, a potion,  
a witch's brew to get me through  
2020 since lockdown started for me on March 15.

A salving cocktail, if you will,  
could maybe numb the hurt  
of 200,000 (and counting)  
erased from the country;

a cocktail to salve the scary fears  
my friends endured,  
their fevers, coughing, pneumonias,  
ventilators, quarantines  
away from their loved ones;

a cocktail to assuage my teacher friends  
at wit's end  
on a rollercoaster of administrative indecision  
“just teach online”:

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(virtual too euphemistic...far too benign),  
no wait, in-person, no wait online, no wait, hybrid,  
no wait ...,

two full-time jobs  
with parents at wits' end hammering  
their email keyboards morning to night  
demanding answers teachers don't have;

    a cocktail that calms kids' confusion  
while adults around them play out domestic drama,  
voices muzzled, ignored  
day after day;

    a cocktail that hushes the deniers, those ill-  
informed,  
head-up-their-a\$\$, anti-logic, anti-mask,  
anti-sanity spewers, hoax-mongers of breathtaking  
ignorance;

    a cocktail to set at my feet  
where my beloved old Watty used to lie,  
to get me through that silence;

    a cocktail that grants me sleep.

As with the Shakespeare hags  
with their cauldron brewing cocktail,  
there go I:

*"Round about the cauldron go;  
In the poison'd entrails of potus I'd throw.  
Toad, his henchman rudyominous, I'd pull from under*



BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS

*cold stone,  
Boil thou i' the charmed pot.  
Double, double this toil's no trouble;  
Fire 'em up and burn, let the cauldron bubble.  
Fillet of fenny snake,  
Toss in a pence, not worth a shilling, in cauldron boil and  
bake,  
Eye of mitch and toe of frogsmillershill,  
Rushian wool of jared and mal-onia tongue salivating  
swill,  
Adder's fork barr no truth and blind-worm's sting,  
Lizard's leggy kellycon and vulture's wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil 'em till they bubble.  
Double, double this toil's no trouble;  
Fire 'em up and burn, let the cauldron bubble."  
The hangover would be worth it.*

LINDA  
MITCHELL

# 2020 DUPLEX



LINDA MITCHELL

This poem brought all the wrong tools for the job  
I've rolled up my sleeves to dig by hand

2020 is a year to lend a hand  
gloved hands, smiles behind masks

Love thy neighbor is spelled w-e-a-r a m-a-s-k  
After derecho, hurricane, flood, and fires

Hurricane before flood, derecho before fires  
too many birds with nowhere to rest

Neither harvest-moon nor harvest time offer rest  
There's a vote to bring in, cell phones to ring

Approved counting is by tree trunk ring  
Closed eyes clasped hands circle the wreck

Poets throw lines to clear the wreck  
This poem brought all the wrong tools for the job



# GOALS FOR CONSTITUTION DAY



LINDA MITCHELL

Live up to my part of  
*We the People*  
Participate in building  
*a more perfect union*  
Insist peacefully on justice  
even in and especially in protest  
Contribute toward  
national *tranquility*  
Appreciate grave sacrifices made  
for our *common defense*  
Advocate for the well being of  
our community, country

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and whole world

Share *blessings of liberty*

with family, friends, neighbors

now and going forward

as someone of

The *United States of America*

# THANK YOU NOTE



LINDA MITCHELL

Thanks for hands  
that milked the goat  
then made that milk  
into soap  
added rosemary  
a hint of mint,  
spoon of memory—  
and friendship.

Praise for hands  
that knit soft squares  
made to wash away  
dirt and wear.

Bless the feet  
that delivered here

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love-made gifts  
with good cheer.

To close this note  
I also thank  
the goat for munching on  
weeds and grass  
from someone's lawn  
for giving milk  
as her part  
in a summer swap  
of poetical arts.

Sincerely,  
Linda M. August 2020



# KINDRED



LINDA MITCHELL

She was a math and science Mom

I was built for pretty words

As we grew together

we fell in love by page turns

Her precision met my poetical

fairy tale by fairy tale

Bible story by Little Golden Book.

Terms of our peace laid out and agreed upon  
from *Once Upon a Time* until *The End*.

ANNA J. SMALL  
ROSEBORO

# SUN AND FUN



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

Today the sun shines bright and bold on all who  
head outside

Today we can't go out how we wish the sun would  
shine inside

Inside it would warm our friends longing to be out  
having fun

Inside, not free to travel; inside with no sun or  
strength to run

How I wish I could be of help to those who wish to  
be out

Out in the bright sun, feeling bold having fun

Fun because of full bellies poking out

Fun because they have the strength to run

But we won't give up we'll help where we can

But we won't give up whatever the time span

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Span across days we remain sheltered inside  
Span through weeks we'll keep our smiles

# IS IT TIME TO GO?



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

It is time to go. Time to move over so others can  
grow?

Show they have the passion that has kept me here so  
long.

Is it time to stay to accompany others on the way?

Will I know the time? Will I know the day?

To show they have the passion that has kept me  
here so long

They need space inside the place. Will I have the  
grace?

Will I know the time? Will I know the day

To collect my stuff, step aside, or leave and go  
outside?

They need space inside the place

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With space to develop their own ideas and so will I  
have the grace

To collect my stuff, step aside, leave and go outside?

Or will I stay right here and share in this glorious  
place.

They call me, "The Nudge" so they must not  
begrudge

The fact that I've left in a rush

Some day soon, with a smile they'll say as they blush

Now you can go your way. We are here to stay.

Thanks so much. We'll stay in touch.

# WE NEED YOU!



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

There you stand sexy and bright  
Ready to bring me light when it's night.  
Curvacious and zaftig, oh how you glow!  
Crowned with a linen skirt, blanchy like snow.  
Thin steel arms extend out stiffly.  
A tiny button turns you on quickly.

What would I do without your beauty?  
On dark nights, I could not do my duty  
Sending out letters and sending out notes  
Reminding my friends to research for their votes.

We've got to express ourselves on the ballot  
We've got to see that life's more than a shallot.  
We must peel back the layers and get to the core.  
Learn the truth about government; there's so much  
more.

There you stand, firm and strong.

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You've kept me company oh so long

Listening with me to many a song

While I'm stuck inside away from throng.

Shine on, my friend, keep bringing me light.

Push back the night; keep my smile bright.



# STYMIED BY A STYLUS



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

I ordered a stylus online,  
Blame it on COVID one nine.  
I couldn't get out to the stores.  
So I ordered, then went back to my chores.  
I got what I ordered  
But not what I wanted.

I thought I was so current communicating online,  
most of the time.

Now, as the devices are getting smaller and my  
fingers are getting stiffer,  
I need help. The stylus is supposed to make me work  
swifter.

I just wanted one of those nobby nosed markers, not  
pointy like a cone,

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To tap the letters and numbers on my tablet and cell  
phone.

Instead of moving forward with technology,  
I'm having to go back to ancient times.  
Nothing is really new. The oldies knew what to do.  
Sharpen a stick and scratch out the letter.  
Use the smooth end, to erase and make it better.

Everything old is new again.  
The old fashioned stylus is taking a spin  
And creating havoc for me!

I went online, thinking I'd get it time  
I wanted to use I to draft this day's rhyme  
To work really fast,  
With something that will last

But it didn't work.  
And It wasn't a quirk.  
I just didn't know  
My ignorance would show.

What goes around, comes around  
I wish I'd known what I'd need for a phone.  
Ignorance about an old fashioned tool  
Is making this here lady look like a fool.  
Now everyone knows, I'm not all that cool.

# THE REDWOODS



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

Walking through Redwoods Forest with my Honey,  
Standing among the majestic giants is worth much  
more than money.

Who could imagine two hundred years ago  
When the seeds that first fell down to the ground  
The two hundred feet up these trees would grow.  
The awesome breadth, thirty feet around!

The crinkly quiet as we walk around, listening for,  
but hearing no sound.

The twin trees leaning against each other remind us  
that we need each other  
To stand tall, so we won't fall.

Like the Redwoods, we must stand fast to the last.

Oh God, we give You glory for it all.

[image of tree]



# LOVE IT OR LIGHTEN IT



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

Love the skin you're in  
Be satisfied and you'll win,  
Unless your skin is black or brown  
Then few folks even want you around.  
    "High yellow is mellow,"  
Says the gawking fellow.  
"And white is all right!"  
"Don't even say it", I'll fight.  
    Melanin count predicted your life.  
If you're dark, choose light for your wife.  
Do so and lighten up the family tree.  
    Lighteners is what we were expected to be.  
Those who purged the line of black  
"If you're black," they said, "get back".

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Thankfully, we were taught to be proud.  
“I’m black and I’m proud!” we’d shout out loud  
Today when I hear that exact same stuff  
I turn a deaf ear and walk off in a huff.

# SONGS SOOTHE AND HELP US CRUISE



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

Songs of praise help me get through the days  
Hymns to Him remind me of ways  
He helps get out, but not out and about  
During forced days of inside stays.

Rhythm and blues when I hear the news  
I reach for my running shoes.  
Discordant news pulse within. I just want to jump  
and shout  
Please just let me get up and get out.

Hallujah's resound; so often out of tune.  
While riding my indoor cycle, listening to YouTube,  
I croon.

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Oh no! Another family member has died!

Not dirges this time; compassion accompanied me as  
I cried.

I rocked and swayed in my seat, reading another  
sympathy card.

“May melodies and memories remind you of our  
family’s regard.”

Folks may be dying all around, but flowers burst  
forth in the yard.

Jazz riffs in these poems, within the beat  
Of the daily given challenge, be-bop along and are  
neat.

Each writer saying what’s in the heart  
Resolved to keep on living, giving each day a fresh  
new start.

Cheery notes from friends help us stay afloat  
In these strident times, we’re not alone in the boat.



# LEAD ON!



ANNA J. SMALL ROSEBORO

Sarah, congratulations to you.  
With poetry, you've helped us to view  
Our lives through another lens  
And we now see ourselves as friends.  
    Congratulations to you, my dear.  
We once were striving writers. It is you we cheer  
You invited us to share your dream.  
We're now a thriving poetry team.  
    I thank you from the depths of my heart  
Because of you, I made a start  
Created VERSING LIFE TOGETHER.  
We'll keep writing despite the weather  
    We're learning to talk about life in rhyme  
It's now more fun, but still lots of work.  
Lead on, my friend, no need to shirk.  
This work is worthy of your time.

LAURA  
LANGLEY

# A STREETSIDE ELEGY IN C



LAURA LANGLEY

Our quintet gathers  
on respective curbs  
(More than six feet apart:  
This distance is not mandated,  
This distance is neighborly love,  
This distance is  
paradoxically  
infuriatingly  
against the status quo.  
This distance is avant garde.)

Neighbors converse  
Two octaves  
cleaved together  
cleaved apart

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We are whole C notes  
They are whole C notes  
No notes between  
We create dissonance  
We create consonance

Once in a while  
A car a cyclist a walker  
Will interject an E or a G  
A momentary  
chord is struck  
An interrupted cadence  
head-nods smiles hello's

# THE WEATHER IN 2020



LAURA LANGLEY

On a scrap of paper in the archives is written  
“I have forgotten my umbrella.”  
Turns out, in a pandemic everyone,  
not just the philosopher, is without.  
These days, I slather antibacterial gel on my angry,  
red, cracked hands every time I get in my car—  
I never even used to own antibacterial gel.  
These days, I pull clumsily-fitting, homemade masks  
across my face to protect  
me  
them  
their families  
my family.  
Every slight ache, scratch at the back of my throat,

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heated moment has me Googling, yet again, the  
symptoms.

When Rachel had it (all alone in Mexico City—just  
her

and an ornery, orange cat) she only lost her sense of  
taste,

8 days, but what next? Is there a sequel to this  
horror?

So I

buy clothes that can withstand virus-killing high  
heat,

buy shoes that never see the inside of my home,

join book clubs to discuss our nation's original sins,

buy more books than I have time to read to learn,

listen.

I pull the umbrella from under the backseat of my  
car,

So that I can meet my students at this moment.

A moment when the murder of yet another black  
man

in the name of law is a weekly occurrence.

A moment when leaders are living above the same  
laws

that keep so many in bondage.

And, also in this moment, I'm reminded that young  
folks

see and breathe truth. Young folks do not tolerate

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COVID-19 IN POEMS

what this country has passively accepted for 400  
years.

We will get by. We will survive.

Note from Jamie about the poem: Inspired by  
Claudia Rankine's "Weather"





# I DRAW MY INK FROM



LAURA LANGLEY

another frustrating encounter with a student.  
a disappointing conversation with a coworker.  
an argument after dinner.

my intuition squaring up with my intellect.  
the trembling, yet unwavering need for gloves-off  
bitching.  
the pending therapy session.

beautiful words wherever and whenever they find  
me.  
fleeting observations surely supercharged with  
meaning.  
teaching by example.



# OUTCOME



LAURA LANGLEY

I have a deep-rooted sense that  
things  
will  
work  
out.

Of course they do: work out.

The universe grows itself.

The universe makes space for life.

The universe designs organisms for growth.

Like all living things,  
we are microscopic prototypes  
of a benevolent universe.

I exist, therefore I am good.



# "JOURNEY"



I—we—journey through this well-worn, unknown  
territory. Twenty down, twenty weeks  
to go. Invisible change: bone,  
organ, tissue, vessel. My low back creaks.  
Cells install new plumbing that requires tweaks.  
As it's evolving into its new form  
I try to listen as my body speaks.  
We prepare as if awaiting a storm;  
contemplating the future keeps us warm.  
Like packing for a months long trip at sea:  
Gather stock, consult pros for the new norm.  
Savoring the now while planning is key.  
We charge on from one journey to the next  
full of joy yet increasingly perplexed.

BARBARA  
EDLER

# LOOKING FOR SIGNS IN SPRING



BARBARA EDLER

From here  
Your favored spot  
I watch  
Elm tree buds  
Frantically waving  
I feel  
Sun rays  
Warming my face  
I ponder  
Pregnant clouds  
Full of promise  
I recall  
Devil's Tower, last summer  
An ominous wind's

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Keening lament

I stared

At a burnt tree

Frozen in place

Were you calling to me then?

I've been waiting so long

For a sign

Today, gazing at the spring sky

In your favorite place

I wonder

Are you loved?

Are you safe?



# MELTDOWN IN AISLE THREE



BARBARA EDLER

In Aisle Three  
At Hy-Vee  
I have a meltdown  
Shelves literally wiped clean  
No juice, no milk, no sardines  
There's barely any meat  
Except where the butchers work  
I ask about an advertised sale on New York strips  
I thought they had  
They do, they're just not marked  
I ask for four  
The butcher looks relieved  
Which makes sense later when  
I discover from a friend someone had just come in

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and ordered  
200 pounds of hamburger  
I'm here for just a few items  
And now I freeze  
In Aisle Three  
Tears forming the question,  
What's yet to come?  
My youngest son  
was just married last week  
Which never would have happened  
This week  
Knowing he works stocking stores  
I fear he may get it  
The thought of losing  
One more child  
Has me falling down  
Gripping an empty shelf  
So many plans are now on hold  
The uncertainty of the future overwhelms me  
As I pray for miracles  
Amongst the cans of corn and beans

# RITUALS



BARBARA EDLER

Last year a knock on the door  
Woke me from an uneasy slumber  
Believing you were coming home  
I never dreamt I would find  
Two officers at my door  
Eventually informing me  
You were never coming home  
Now I wake to a numbing weight  
Daily exercising my best to bury it deep  
Reminding myself to love  
To forgive; to live with purpose  
To believe you're in a better place  
Carefully I straighten a homemade ornament  
Cherishing it more than ever  
Because at its center is  
Your brilliant child's face

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Now the day begins with  
Wearing a necklace with your fingerprint  
Dreaming of hearing your musical voice  
Singing, "Oh, Mama Mia."  
Imagining your warm embrace  
Wishing I could have  
Eradicated your demons  
To have wrapped you so tightly with my love  
That you would have never chosen to leave

# SO MUCH DEPENDS ON COVID-19



BARBARA EDLER

So Much Depends on Covid-19  
My son called today, so  
Sad that his honeymoon was cancelled, much  
Suffering lately; lives lost, special plans aborted,  
depends  
On one's ability to love from a distance, upon  
Lysol, gloves, protecting ourselves, each other, a  
Cacophony of grief reverberates, red  
As this ruined wheelbarrow

Note from Barbara about the poem: Inspired by  
William Carlos Williams "The Red Wheelbarrow"

ALLISON  
BERRYHILL

# FROM MY OPEN HAND



ALLISON BERRYHILL

I give you  
the benefit of the doubt  
quick and generous laughter  
rose tint on that glass  
tilted toward the #IowaSky  
a job that suits your skills  
and leaves soft petals  
as your footprints  
I give you  
gravel to run on  
a new skill to learn  
evidence of synergy:  
a Broadway musical  
a complex interstate cloverleaf

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a four-leaf clover

the First Amendment

I give you

a chance to be kind (take it)

a chance to forget that slight (take it)

a chance to step up (take it)

a poem to write (write it)



# RUNNING FROM BOTH SIDES



ALLISON BERRYHILL

Running  
Pain and drain of energy  
And weight of body's lethargy  
The headwinds pounding westerly  
I looked at runs that way  
    I've also run to hope and heal  
To know the solace that is real  
And afterward, endorphins feel  
I welcome runs today  
    I've looked at running's cons and pros  
Its ups and downs, its highs and lows  
The motivation comes and goes  
A twin-edged path this runner knows.

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Note from Allison about the poem: Based on Joni  
Mitchell “Both Sides Now”

# OVILLEJO FROM THE EARTH



ALLISON BERRYHILL

I found upon the step a puppy's tooth.

I tell the truth.

Small and clean and white as milk,

Smooth as silk.

A treasure cradled in my palm,

A gift of calm.

Who knew a tooth as mid-day balm?

A small white star, come down to earth:

A tiny sigh, a tiny mirth.

I tell the truth smooth as silk a gift of calm

Note from Allison about the poem: Three rhyming couplets and a quatrain "What has earth given you?"



# SONNET TO VERSELOVE



ALLISON BERRYHILL

From April one to thirty, close of day  
I wrote a verse according to the plan.  
“Just do the verb to be the noun,” they say—  
I think, I think, I think, I think I can.

The Little Engine could, and so could I.  
With fuel of gentle comments for my words  
My willingness to share was magnified.  
I chugged ahead because my thoughts were heard.

How can I recreate what happened here?  
How can this vision turn into a plan?  
How can I help my students face their fear?  
My Little Engine chugs: “I think I can.”  
I think, I think, I think, therefore I am.  
This Little Engine celebrates: iamb

MO DALEY

# TENSE OVERDUE



MO DALEY

I'm afraid I'm losing my mind  
I'm perpetually tense  
Tense intense pretense  
Tense every minute of the day  
Day turns into night  
Day one day two day three are all the same  
Same stress  
Same house  
House is a place of work  
House doesn't seem like home  
Home is no longer cozy  
Home is what I miss  
Miss real work  
Miss friends  
Friends who listen  
Friends who support

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Support each other  
Support our kids  
Kids who don't understand  
Kids who don't deserve isolation  
Isolation that angers us  
Isolation to save the human race  
Race away from others  
Race to the store  
Store what we want  
Store what we need  
Need to walk away from technology  
Need human contact  
Contact old friends  
Contact family  
Family who I can't hug  
Family so far away  
Away from here but not my heart  
Away from my embrace  
Embrace the luxury to work from home  
Embrace this time of reflection  
Reflection sends my mind racing  
Reflection on the important  
Important things now change  
Important people stay the same  
Same thing day after day  
Same heart being torn apart  
Apart is painful



BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS

Apart is frustrating  
Frustrating is something I can live with  
Frustrating is a small price to pay  
Pay the devil his due  
Pay it forward with love  
Love  
Due



# NIGHT TERRORS



MO DALEY

They come when I am happy  
They come when I am anxious  
They come when they will-  
When I'm with a houseful of family celebrating in  
Colorado  
When I've shared a delightful evening with my  
husband  
When I've hiked Machu Picchu and am finally able  
to rest  
The Night Terrors  
They come without warning  
Insidiously creeping into my psyche  
Tugging at fears that are buried so far below the  
surface  
That I didn't even know they were there  
They prod, they poke, they push frantically

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Until the bony hand of the man chasing me  
Grabs me so tightly around the throat  
That I can't scream  
Although I am terrified,  
I've never been one to keep quiet  
So I try  
And I try  
And I try  
To be heard  
Until at last,  
The low-pitched groan releases from my throat  
Turning into a shrill, ear-splitting scream  
That wakes the house  
Welcoming them into my nightmare

# DETAILS OF A DRIVEWAY VISIT



MO DALEY

The blue painter's tape  
running down the middle of the driveway  
separates us.

So completely-  
like mountains sprouted from seeds  
like oceans born from salty tears  
like walls fought for with hateful hearts.  
But how can a child understand borders?



# MY TINY STAR



MO DALEY

Twenty years ago, the Star Magnolia was a mere  
bush in the yard when we moved in  
My boys were barely seven, ten, and twelve  
They zoomed around the yard, throwing any and  
every kind of ball they could find  
The tiny Star Magnolia served as a hurdle for their  
running games,  
Losing leaves when they jumped too soon.

We took family trips over spring break- D. C.,  
Colorado, and California.

The fragrant Star Magnolia would bloom each  
spring whether we saw it or not.

But truth be told, I was always heartbroken when I  
saw the withered and browned petals strewn about  
the lawn

When we pulled into the driveway after a vacation.

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The boys grew.

Soon the Star Magnolia served as a backdrop for  
graduation and prom pictures,

Casting just enough shade on my growing giants.

The tiny Star has now grown to over twelve feet in  
height

And even my six-and-a-half-foot tall, little man can  
no longer jump it.

Since there was nowhere to go this spring,

I watched from the kitchen window as her petals  
fluttered and fell to the ground

But I thought of the new little boy, the son of my  
son,

Who will play in the Star's shade for so many years  
to come.



EMILY  
YAMASAKI

# FORTUNES FOR MY SISTER



EMILY YAMASAKI

Fortunes for my sister, Dr. Tsai  
Believe that this too shall pass.  
Order in tonight, you deserve it.  
Always add guacamole for extra charge – worth it.  
Life is full of challenges, you got this.  
You are an amazing doctor, but an even more  
amazing sister.  
Don't worry, your patients can feel your kindness  
from just your eyes.  
Be on the lookout for care packages.  
May your coffee be as strong as your gown and mask  
today.  
Never forget: you were born for this.

BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS

Self care. Do it. I don't mean yoga – I mean cookies.  
You are a hero – and not just to me.



# ABANDONED



EMILY YAMASAKI

School Abandoned  
No one sitting in those blue chairs  
*Teachers care,*  
Dust on desks, no pencil tin  
*it's really in*  
the dim, empty hall; no tracked mud  
*our blood*  
feels lifeless without a “hey, bud”  
A school with no pulse or heartbeat  
eerie and just a bit too neat  
Teachers care, it's really in our blood



# THE NEWS



EMILY YAMASAKI

A global threat  
is creeping within  
unexpected bodies  
Taking one, two...  
Two hundred thousand

But we are quarantined  
But we are careful  
But we wear masks  
But we wash hands  
Our home is our haven –

*“We want to immediately share  
that one of our community members  
has tested positive for COVID-19...”*

No one is safe  
How does one face  
this fear?





# THIN



EMILY YAMASAKI

This year I am  
Stretched thin  
Not the skinny girl thin  
Nor the skim, might-as-well-be-water, milk thin  
Not even the angel hair pasta kinda thin

The kind of  
Stretched thin  
Makes you wonder if nanny-ing would be easier  
If fall 2020 is the one  
Where you throw in the teacher towel

The kind of  
Stretched thin  
Makes you wanna  
be

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somewhere

someone

anyone

else

KATRINA  
MORRISON

# CHRONIC BUT WELL



KATRINA MORRISON

Cystic fibrosis is a genetic disease  
Cystic fibrosis is chronic  
Chronic coughing is a common symptom  
Chronic constipation is another  
Another symptom is poor weight gain  
Another symptom is a compromised immune  
system  
System is altered on the cellular level  
System degenerates over time  
Over time medicines have been developed  
Over time procedures are improved  
Improved lung function is always the goal  
Improved school attendance is a result  
Result of sputum culture determines treatment

BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
COVID-19 IN POEMS

Result of the x-ray can be pneumonia  
Pneumonia is a bff – bad frequent friend  
Pneumonia can mean a hospital stay  
Stay away from anyone else with CF  
Stay away from smokers  
Smokers create second hand smoke  
Smokers cause asthma attacks  
Attacks are handled with nebulized albuterol  
Attacks are prevented by nebulized saline  
Saline cannot properly pass through the cell walls  
Saline (a common salt) is present in sweat  
Sweat tests can diagnose the presence of CF  
Sweat of patients dries white on the skin  
Skin can be affected by some medicines  
Skin rashes like red man syndrome appear  
Appear at the CF clinic on a regular basis  
Appear at the gastroenterologist's office  
Office at school must keep 504 on file  
Office should understand nature of the disease  
Disease delays growth and puberty  
Disease results in high male infertility rates  
Rate per capita is highest in Ireland  
Rates are higher wherever the British colonized  
Colonized in the lungs can be Staphylococcus  
aureus Haemophilus influenzae  
Pseudomonas aeruginosa Burkholderia cepacia  
MRSA and more

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More patience is required by patients who must  
spend

More time than imaginable on treatments

Treatments include performing respiratory  
physiotherapy

Treatments must occur multiple times a day

A day will include taking enzymes with every meal

A day may include using a Mic-Key button for  
nutrition

Nutrition must have an extremely high calorie count

Nutrition must have a high fat count as well

Well Staying well is the goal

Well in body mind and spirit

Spirit comes from the Latin word for to breathe

Spirit breathe spirit breathe spirit just breathe

# EKPHRASTIC POEM



KATRINA MORRISON

[image included]

It was the teacher's to assign  
Who sat in each row and line.  
Hung so proudly on display  
Students work from yesterday.  
Words and drawings illustrate  
What the teacher would relate.  
Teachers brought something to show.  
Students came up row by row.

Cursive lost the writing race  
Technology's now in its place.  
Dressing up is not the style  
We wear jeans once in a while.  
Austerity we don't embrace.

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We put up posters in its place.

Things have changed so very much

Are we any more in touch?



# GOLDEN SHOVEL POEM



KATRINA MORRISON

I'm able to enter unnoticed.  
Nobody will know I was here.  
Who needs all the air in the room.  
Are not peace and quiet enough?  
You will understand this, if you  
Are at peace too.  
You can't get enough of being  
Nobody. You can't go  
Too unnoticed.



# MIRROR POEM



KATRINA MORRISON

Commas precede  
Conjunctions when  
Listing items in  
A series.  
Oxford  
Rules!  
    Never  
Place  
Commas  
Before “and, but,  
Or “or,” when you  
List items in a series.



# ACROSTIC ANALOGY



KATRINA MORRISON

Stupefy is to stunning as

Protego is to protecting as

Expelliarmus is to disarming as

Lumos is to lighting as

Leviosa (Wingardium) is to levitating as

Scourgify is to cleaning.

Source: <http://www.mtv.com/news/1914360/harry-potter-spell-ranked-by-usefulness/>



# OVILLEJO



KATRINA MORRISON

Didn't expect to find you here,  
Slithering near.

    Your scales so smooth provide shielding,  
Yet unyielding.

    A single amber stripe I see,  
Cautioning me.

    As I kneel here on bended knee,  
We're a terrestrial trinity,  
Just earth, just you, it's just us three.  
Slithering near yet unyielding cautioning me.

SEANA  
WRIGHT



# DISTANCE LEARNING?



SEANA WRIGHT

Fifth  
Students  
Distance learning?  
Are you learning?  
Have technology?  
Momma's cell or daddy's?  
What is going on at home?  
Who is there encouraging you?  
Is there quiet and a place to write?  
Will you be ready for middle school soon?



# BRAIN POWER



SEANA WRIGHT

Daddy was analytical  
Mommy was emotional  
He knew people  
and she saw intention  
They both could see BS  
coming 'a mile away  
They taught me to think first  
and use your mouth second.  
Didn't always do that  
especially when I was  
younger but time, being a teacher  
and becoming a mother has  
taught me  
to "shut up" sometimes.  
Daddy said to surround  
yourself with like-minded people

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those who are as smart or  
smarter than you.

Mommy sat with those who laughed,  
cried, analyzed, danced and cussed.

I enjoyed being the only child during my  
younger years surrounded by scholars, educated  
fools

and souls in search of love and meaning.

I watch people now sometimes and wonder  
why they're angry, ugly, thrilled or peaceful

What narrative is running through  
their head and heart?

What narrative is running through mine?

I just want to make sure I stay  
centered and always at peace.

# PARENT CONVERSATION- CODE SWITCHING



SEANA WRIGHT

“Mrs. Jones, Let’s talk about your son Johnny”

*Listen here lady, Ima ’bout to give you the skinny about your son. He’s special.*

“I’m concerned about his lack of attention during class”

*You told me you took drugs years ago. Is he a drug baby?*

“At times, he has difficulty listening long enough while I explain multiple-step math problems.”

*He listens five seconds then looks around for classmates to laugh with.*

“He talks too much to classmates especially during

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individual work time.”

*I want to say “shut up and let them work, don’t you notice they’re quiet?”*

“Yes, mom I can send some extra work home but that’s not necessarily going to help.”

*You’ve got 3 kids younger than him. Worksheets aren’t babysitters!*

“I know you say he reads books at home and reads the dictionary daily but he doesn’t do that here.”

*Stop lying. He’s two grade levels behind and has been in reading intervention for 3 years.*

“Your son needs more time and help so that’s why I’m bringing up the subject of retention again.”

*Sign this paper right now so we can get your baby some help. You should’ve done this when the three previous teachers asked but you kept saying you’d work with him at home. You can’t do that because you’re not a teacher!!!*

# WRITING PROCEDURE



SEANA WRIGHT

Process

I read the topic

and the mentor text

I marvel at the samples and

wonder if I'm a fraud

then realize I'm not

I think of previous writings

I remember students, daughters,

friends, family, situations

I ponder how revealing to be.

Hurts, successes, events, strengthenings

ALL come into my brain

as I consider how much to confess.

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All of this is done with a huge mug of  
Kona Joe coffee and the quiet of a morning.



# MY RECTANGULAR HONEY



SEANA WRIGHT

I desired you before  
I even met you.  
You kept popping up  
on commercials and  
billboards *begging me*  
to pick you and embrace you.  
You appealed to my  
sense of wanting to have the latest  
gadget, wanting to be ‘fly’,  
wanting to be a rockstar.  
I forced myself, though, to wait *a year*  
due to all the recalls and upgrades.

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Once I had you, I slept with you, took you into the  
bathroom, and downloaded a multitude of  
unnecessary apps just so I could see  
those colorful little squares.

Now that you're mine and we've been hitched for  
10+ years, I still *desire* you.

You keep me connected to faraway descendants  
you hold images of angels, my past and present,  
and new learnings.

Also, though, you have brought me dreadful  
words and have given me depressive  
news that took me to the floor.

At times I'm *addicted* to you  
like a 16-year old girl having the hots for a 20-year old  
boy  
which is *alarming* considering  
I lived without you for the first thirty years of my life.

MARGARET  
SIMON

APRIL 29, 2020



MARGARET SIMON

The day's date tops a crisp clean page.  
A poem, a prompt, a quote muses me,  
so I sip coffee and think on it  
with a pen. Today's color is green.  
Where does this poem want to go?  
Keep the pen moving.  
Magic can happen here.  
Words can smooth out the wrinkles,  
soothe me into believing I'm a writer.

# EIGHT REASONS TO TAKE A WALK ON SUNDAY MORNING



MARGARET SIMON

8. Bells chime a call to worship  
to empty pews echoing the song of trees.

7. I'm sorry I keep taking the same path,  
the same images do not grow weary of me noticing.

I pick gardenias from CeCe's side yard.  
If she came out, she wouldn't mind.

6. I stop at Anne's to view her century plant as it  
reaches  
skyward. A century plant waits 25 years to bloom,  
blooming only once in a lifetime. A lifetime  
I took for granted only weeks ago.

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5. I can take my time.  
No one will call to check on me.  
I'll check the feeders:  
the hummingbirds like sweet water.  
I'll get to it in time.
4. I walk and walk  
wondering if it will always be this way.  
Hollow bells pealing for no one.  
No one venturing out to see anyone.
3. It may rain tomorrow. Today,  
the sun shines, the birds sing,  
and I don't have to join the chorus.  
I'll keep singing to myself.
2. A link was sent by email  
to a video church service, one priest, one reader.  
The organist plays  
as though the cathedral is full.  
Full feels scary now.  
Full carries weight.  
Who wants to be full?
1. I close this book,  
heat another cup of tea,  
and find my shoes,  
find my way,  
fill my day.  
and perhaps...  
Bloom!

# A VIEW FROM FOREVER SATURDAY



MARGARET SIMON

A change will be arriving here.  
Come near.  
The captive shell is broken free.  
Follow me.  
Someone will likely lose their way.  
You may.  
We're on the crest of a new day.  
Fear should never capture your hand.  
When Moon rises above this land.  
Come near. Follow me. You may.





# THE DUPLEX OF VIRTUAL TEACHING



MARGARET SIMON

Butterfly wings remind her of her mother  
A monarch is held by a child's fingers  
    A child's fingers hold her face before a screen  
The screen fades as she covers her mouth to speak  
    If she can fade by covering her mouth  
no one will notice she is there  
    No one will notice she is there  
or not there; activate the mute button  
    Activate mute speaks louder than words  
In a virtual world, you may miss something  
    In a virtual world, you may miss  
her hand reaching out to touch you

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Her hand may reach out to touch you  
like a mother's touch in butterfly wings

# MAGIC BEAN



MARGARET SIMON

How a writer is made  
some think comes from a magic bean—  
it just is  
this writer can't help but write & write,  
but I know better.

I know a writer comes from the magic wand  
of a teacher who told her  
she was.

A teacher finds magic  
in the light of a child's words,  
rubs the lantern again & again.  
She knows the power of waiting,  
of how a seed of an idea  
can sprout  
if you give it

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nourishment

& time.

I love most  
the smile of realization  
“Wow! I wrote that!”  
Pride from my wishing  
which, in the end,  
is me working magic,  
still unknown,  
still a mystery.

DONETTA  
NORRIS

# SHELTER-IN-PLACE



DONETTA NORRIS

Home Inside  
Staying safe  
Sanity wanes  
Online learning links  
Zoom video meetings  
Writing to help clear my mind  
Stretching myself with poetry  
Uncertain of what will come of it  
Hoping others will shelter-in-place too

# DEAR ONLINE LEARNING,



DONETTA NORRIS

I realize that you are not a novelty, by any means.  
You were the method by which I obtained my  
teaching degree.  
But, it is so different having to be on the creative  
side,  
rather than the user side.  
I now have become the producer of online  
instruction, and  
to be perfectly honest, this is hard.  
I can only imagine how the parents of my Scholars  
must feel;  
having to learn to navigate apps, usernames,  
passwords, and downloads.  
Online Learning, are you here to stay?

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Will this continue as the new landscape of  
education?

I hope not...I miss the smiles of my Scholars...  
their hugs, high-fives, and hand shakes.

I know this is not your fault, Online Learning.

You are the result of something so sinister  
that no one could have ever fathomed would occur  
in our lifetime.

I guess, though, Online Learning, when I look on  
the bright side,

Many of us are learning new skills.



INCORPORATING  
“WE REAL COOL”  
BY GWENDOLYN  
BROOKS



DONETTA NORRIS

We are doing hard things that are  
Real hared to understand and have us losing our  
Cool. Enhancing our skills sets so  
We can deliver what our Scholars need. Having  
nothing  
Left sometimes, but try as we might to keep  
School as normal as possible.  
We push online learning despite the fears that  
Lurk beneath the surface of it all. Fearing it's too  
Late to meet all their diverse needs.  
We try to extend grace to ourselves and others as we

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Strike against the status quo  
Straight toward the unknown.  
We are the champions of doing more with less. So,  
we  
Sing our own praises for our valiant efforts. There is  
no  
Sin in being unsure and pressing on when  
We are ALL learning on the fly, because there's a  
Thin line between...No! It's wide as hell. Trying to  
score like in  
Gin Rummy and not lose this game.  
We dig deep and search long and hard to  
Jazz up our current circumstance. Praying we make it  
to  
June. Uncertain of how long  
We will work under these conditions...do or  
Die, right or wrong. Longing for an end to this

WAKE UP – TROD  
DOWNSTAIRS TO  
MAKE THE  
DRINK THAT  
WILL GIVE ME  
ENERGY



DONETTA NORRIS

Read and post the Scripture of the day – the Word  
of God gives me life

Practice Spanish via an app – hopefully I'll be fluent  
before I die

Read the corresponding date of my Daily Bible –  
there's no such thing as too much God

Pray

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Workout for an hour or take a 3-mile walk – moving  
by body is important to me

Shower and dress – pajamas count, right?

Prepare breakfast and multitask for work –  
technically on the clock at 8:45

Review Scholarly work – plan for sending out more

Make contact with parents – try to make this hard  
thing simple...”do the best you can”

Emails, Emails – check and respond

Eat something that is supposed to be lunch – don’t  
judge me

Continue the work cycle until I can’t take it anymore  
– planning, reaching out to parents, reviewing  
activities, checking emails

As dusk approaches, but often not until the dark of  
night

I finally sit down away from the Must-do

Preparing my mind to focus on the Get-to-do, the  
Want-to-do

Notebook open, pens by my side

Drawing a blank on what to write

ANGELICA  
BRAATEN

# TAKING BACK A WISH



ANGELICA BRAATEN

Sad  
Silence  
No more sound  
No more people  
No more rickshaw bells  
No more vehicle horns  
No more deafening dog howls  
What you wish for sometimes comes true  
I wished for the constant noise to stop  
I didn't realize noise equals life

# LETTER FROM FUTURE SELF



ANGELICA BRAATEN

Dear Angie in 2003,

    You will have a birthday.

Your golden birthday.

Cherish it, write about it.

You will forget it if you don't.

    You will love school but you'll also be  
a little rebellious

You should probably stay

a "little" rebellious,

Nothing more.

I know it might be hard for a girl

who always follows the rules.

This will be the one year you do not like your  
English teacher,

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but there's always something to learn.

And you will read a play  
that you will teach in ten years.

Maybe pay more attention.

So you can compare and contrast.

And if you don't want to memorise the feel of  
benches,

you should practice more.

You will get to be a fish  
in your backyard pool.

Enjoy it because while you are fifteen,  
your parents will tell you that you are moving  
to a different state

for the second time in your life.

Your brother will be enraged,  
for good reason – he's a junior.

You will not say anything.

Please say something.

You never have strong opinions  
and maybe you should.

They will ask you how you feel.

You will cry in your room alone  
trying to figure out how you feel.

Somewhere in the middle, always.

Maybe just say that.

At fifteen, you will move to Louisiana  
Cross country.



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COVID-19 IN POEMS

The cat you've had for sixish years will disappear  
right before you leave.

And this is when you will know the feeling of having  
no closure.

Maybe this is when your obsession  
with knowing the truth is formed.

Where did he go?

    You will go to a new school

Experience culture shock.

You will be malleable clay

Wanting to fit into everyone's hands

Shape yourself with your own hands.

You will be exposed to things

Only seen in movies.

You will need to figure out the balance

between being careful and being open.

Write about it.

You will forget it if you don't.

    At fifteen, your dad will give you the keys

to his truck on New Year's Eve

and let you drive somewhere with your friend

even though you've never driven anywhere by  
yourself,

even though you don't have a license?

You will put one foot on each pedal

and know you won't die.

You will enjoy this freedom

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and you will take advantage of it later.

Do not take advantage of it.

At fifteen, you will not live with your brother  
for the first time in your life.

Too soon.

You will be happy for him,  
you will be heartbroken.

It'll be ok...you'll live together again someday.

Not long after, you will no longer live with your  
grandma.

Not long after, you will no longer live with your dad.

Maybe make sure that's what you want.

It will somewhat shape your future.

Write about it.

You will forget it if you don't.

At fifteen, you will exchange "i love you" with  
some guy.

You will think you feel something like love.

Be careful,

many things feel like love at this age,  
at the end of fifteen.

Love,

Angie in 2020

# RECIPROCITY



ANGELICA BRAATEN

Student is to teacher as  
Trust is to relationship as  
Universe is to me as  
Dreams were to King as  
Energy is to machine as  
Nature is to artist as even  
Teacher is to student.



# DETAIL OF SWAMP FOREST



ANGELICA BRAATEN

Roots and branches crawling from water to sky,  
like hundreds of hands raised to heaven.

When does your existence end?

A silent, shadowed maze tucked away.

Baptism in a cha milk tea river,  
Everything works together here.

Follow the leader into the water,  
Follow the leader out of the water.

You are meant to be exactly where you are,  
Connected in wonder. Don't close your eyes.

JAMIE  
LANGLEY

# SONG LYRICS



JAMIE LANGLEY

*if my words did glow with the gold of sunshine  
song lyrics  
ripple in still water  
when there is no pebble tossed  
nor wind to blow*

on any given day, in any given moment  
words ripple through  
a sound track to life  
a link to the moment

*how the hell can a person go to work in the morning  
and come home in the evening and have nothing to say  
twenty year old me could never have imagined  
how do people let go?*

*go to the country, build you a home  
plant a little garden, eat a lot of peaches*

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not far from

our urban garden edged by peach trees

*come on home*

*come on home*

*no you don't want to*

*be alone*

*just come on home*

left me weeping thinking of Rachel

alone in Mexico City

in this time of corona

so easy for the words to ripple through



# AT THE TABLE



facing the screen waiting for them to arrive  
a candle flickers anchoring me to this space  
as they arrive hellos are exchanged  
and should we wait another minute to start  
weather check-in brought lots of partly cloudy  
this is how we talk when we share a table  
intentions spoken patience, sustainability  
motivation, relaxed fluid, schedule or not  
conscious thought visible in faces  
in the grid across my screen

so begins the last day of week one in the remote  
classroom

two show up for office hours  
a little English talk about their reading – lots of time  
happy to talk to familiar people  
easy conversation, hey Ms Langley  
the last class is small

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class begun with how have you been doing  
conversation was easy  
we've been doing it for months  
Kate shared a book talk missed the day class was  
canceled  
a little talk about two stories, energy lacking  
now faces frozen in squares  
words are easy  
but something is missing

# WEATHER



JAMIE LANGLEY

On a morning in March I visited my classroom  
to gather items from my classroom.

Not imagining time to be long, I watered  
and left my plants on the bookshelves by the  
windows.

I discovered that during a pandemic I can get along  
with fewer decisions. What to expect is clearly not  
the lens we are using. The structure of a calendar  
opens in new ways allowing space for  
personalization.

More for me in my life than the anticipated role of  
personalization in my newly forming classes. I  
became

a practicing writer, as I led my students through  
weekly

essays preparing for an AP exam. One writer leading

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many writers. I moved through April losing a  
favorite musician,

Passover for two, and no clear vision of what might  
be next.

What to expect is clearly not the lens we are using.

Before long it was May with traditional end of year  
landmarks

but without the structure of the days, of the weeks.

Eleventh graders

waking up and coming together before logging on to  
a 45 minute

exam from the comfort of more than 80 bedrooms  
around the

city outscoring the students of the past in rows of  
tables and chairs

in a gymnasium. What to expect is clearly not the  
lens we are using.

Summer melted into a Dali-esque landscape until I  
accepted control

adding a workout to my days of walking dogs and  
writing.

School schedules as varied as the elastic ties I use to  
tie back my hair

came and went. I planned in fits and starts fed by  
antiracist ideas

for revisioning curriculum narrowing a focus.

Online instruction

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seasoned my thinking. Books took turns on my  
nightstand  
filling my head and days. Tomorrow our faculty  
meets for the first day  
to plan and learn about an upcoming year. What to  
expect  
is clearly not the lens we are using.



# CREDO



JAMIE LANGLEY

a shift in my life left an empty space  
I missed caring for her  
a layer in my life lost  
    more natural with my daughters  
the connection extends beyond words and space  
though the umbilical cord has been cut  
    what they need is found intuitively  
not through a great laid plan  
is intuition led by the heart in the context of the  
head?  
    a lesson taught goes well  
a hike to a desired summit  
with an aging body, the desire to reach the  
destination keeps me going  
    the hoja santa leaves show me they survived the  
not so cold winter

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mint sprawls out from its corner

they thrive as they push out from the soil



# SALT WATER TAFFY



JAMIE LANGLEY

Mom stood at the stove  
stirring the melting sugar  
and watched the thermometer  
the pot handle held by the mit  
    the light blond liquid  
thickening by the spoon  
a swirl of lines  
led by the spoon  
pulls the edges  
from the sides of the pot  
    lightly buttered fingers  
hold on to globs of hardened  
sugar

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pulling and pulling til  
the strands grow thinner and lighter  
    strands of candy rest  
on sheets of wax paper  
waiting to harden  
fine strands of candy  
pulled between fingers  
create a web of sugar touching every kitchen surface

DENISE HILL

# TURN FROM POEM\*



DENISE HILL

I think I could turn  
into the most kind  
thoughtful loving  
human being  
filled with grace  
and humility.

But each day  
some new stupidity  
has me kvetching  
at the television  
railing against the radio  
muttering into my thoughts.

About the idiots  
the selfish the negligent

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COVID-19 IN POEMS

the self-righteous  
the willfully ignorant  
and all their  
kindred relations.

I studied meditation  
and learned of meta  
how to make phrases  
to silence my worst critic  
to accept others  
just as they are.

Even to embrace  
and show them  
loving thoughts  
like the Dalai Lama  
who was exiled from  
his own country.

Still he shows  
compassion towards those  
who demonize him  
murder his people.  
He only wants peace  
and a safe return.

I am not the Dalai Lama.  
I never believe I could turn  
into anything nearly like him.  
So each day I breathe

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I seethe I reset I try again.

This is who I am.

\*Inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"  
Stanza 32 from Leaves of Grass, which begins, "I  
think I could turn and live with animals, they are so  
placid and self-contain'd..."

# OUR CAMELOT



DENISE HILL

That empty school and parking lot  
normal when the season is hot  
has weeds now grown in every crack  
no students will be coming back  
no building opened as it ought.

I sit instead in this one spot  
behind the screen, it's all I've got  
replacing solid mortared brick  
that empty school.

My students' lives already fraught  
resiliencies are all pulled taut  
my promise I will not take back  
to forge ahead, no afterthought  
mythologize our Camelot  
that empty school.





# INDELIBLE MOMENTS



DENISE HILL

It was the first day of school  
after they found N.  
on a wellness check at his home  
he died sitting in his chair  
cuppa tea left steeping in the kitchen  
I had to meet his students  
tell them he would not  
be coming back  
I asked them to take out  
a blank sheet of paper  
write down their thoughts and feelings  
share if they wanted

It was the first day of school  
after 9/11

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I grappled to make sense  
how to make any of it matter  
whether anyone would  
even show up  
the class was full and silent  
we opened our blank books  
filled them with thoughts and feelings  
we would all look back on  
each decade later

It was the first day of school  
after the pandemic  
it hasn't yet arrived  
but I can already understand  
everything we've lost  
everything I loved most  
now the mounting fear  
and resolve to make it work  
each day I open my journal  
make note of cases and deaths  
locally and globally  
so many thoughts and feelings  
still yet to come

# ELMS ON DEATH ROW



DENISE HILL

Three trees stand solemnly  
in a row just as planted  
nearly one hundred years ago

Each tendril root  
tapped deeply into place  
somnolently holding to earth

Craggy rough bark  
like aged hands so many  
life stories harbored there

Each now marked: a bright red dot  
some roughshod city worker  
sprayed just doing his job

Their days are numbered

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soon hewn to stumps

then those ground flush

I place my hand on one

breathe in breath out

say "Thank you"

then the next: Thank you.

then the next: Thank you.

Lest they go from this world

unappreciated for all

they have provided.

*Thank you.*

ASHLEY  
VALENCIA-PATE

# GROUNDED



ASHLEY VALENCIA-PATE

My toes sink in red clay  
bare feet against Earth  
face upturned and  
Heaven's light shining  
I let the current run  
mind, body, soul, back  
into the gentle Earth—  
Four elements intertwining.  
Don't forget me please.  
The balance must stay  
We both have to connect  
We both need each other  
I ground myself and  
promise to do my part,  
to appreciate the beauty,  
to mourn the loss of land.

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Surrounded by an open field,  
hawks looking at rabbits, cardinals  
looking for worms, and I  
looking up-grounded.





# FEET TO NIGHT



ASHLEY VALENCIA-PATE

Pitter patter of paws  
Pitter patter of feet  
Feet bringing songs  
Feet bringing dances  
Dances that move us  
Dances shaking the day  
Day shines on a farm  
Day embraces the fields  
Fields filled with hunts  
Fields filled with joy  
Joy in kinder treasure  
Joy in bird watching  
Watching cardinals swoop  
Watching dogs run  
Run after rabbits  
Run after wind

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Wind spreading corn

Wind tempting deer

Deer musk and earth

Deer hiding watching

Watching the corn drop

Watching for red brass

Brass bound respectfully

Brass used humbly

Humbly from afar

Humbly with respect

Respect the animal

Respect the land

Land bigger than us

Land wiser and older

Older and gentle

Older and ornery

Ornery with stickers

Ornery with red clay

Red clay squishing

Red clay blowing dust

Dust speckling walls

Dust covering boys

Boys who run

Boys who imagine

Imagine a pirate ship

Imagine stadium lights

Lights of the future

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COVID-19 IN POEMS

Lights from magic bugs  
Bugs that mesmerize  
Bugs who signal night  
Night falls quietly  
Night brings them in  
In to the table  
Quietly like thunder



# GIVE ME A BEAT



ASHLEY VALENCIA-PATE

Give me a beat  
Sharp notes to wake  
Give me a beat  
Crescendos to create  
Give me a beat  
A pause not too long  
Give me a beat  
A moment for a song  
I just need to make a sound  
To rise up, out, to resonate  
I just need to get a little loud  
To push open this gate  
I just need this anger found  
To hit the coda and melt away  
Give me a room  
Acoustics with arms open

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Give me a room  
A voice like an explosion  
Give me a room  
I know I'm not broken  
I just need to make a sound  
To rise up, out, to resonate  
I just need to get a little loud  
To push open this gate  
I just need this anger found  
To hit the coda and melt away

# KEEP THIS FIRE BURNING STEADY



ASHLEY VALENCIA-PATE

Sweet girl, I am standing ready  
Let me examine your tribute  
Keep this fire burning steady  
Mmm, I can smell those veggies  
I sense the stickiness of the fruit  
Sweet girl, I am standing ready  
I think those onions are getting sweaty  
Stop worrying, googling for a substitute  
Keep this fire burning steady  
I must say, you are quite messy  
Sloshing sticky sauces, I need a wetsuit  
Sweet girl, I am standing ready.

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I have a flame, a power I levy  
The propane climbing up my root  
Keep this fire burning steady.  
See how those flavors marry?  
What can my magic execute?  
Sweet girl, I am standing ready.  
Keep this fire burning steady



SCOTT  
MCCLOSKEY

THOUGHTS  
WHILE WAITING  
FOR THE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION'S  
DECISION OF  
WHAT WILL  
HAPPEN IN THE  
FALL



SCOTT MCCLOSKEY

Or

THE 5 ES LESSON PLAN IN THE TIME OF

BRIDGE THE DISTANCE: AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
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COVID-19

Etymology —

Does school need to be  
face-to-face? Does direct  
instruction mean we are actually  
in the same room, together?  
Does school mean “the building,”  
the brick and mortar — built  
in the 1950s, faulty HVAC system —  
building? The word school comes  
from the Greek meaning leisure  
and philosophy and, yes, it also  
means lecture place, but the  
Google definition mentioned  
leisure first, so we’ll highlight  
that and besides “where I  
lecture” isn’t as important as  
where the “learning” takes place:  
In the minds of my students. So,  
in your face Aristotle — and don’t  
get me started on the absurd notion  
(and hugely problematic practice)  
of requiring all kids to wear uniforms,  
to sit up straight at their desks — in their  
home offices? — while leaving their  
Zoom cameras on.

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Entomology —

Which leads me to the question,  
what do these people — the over  
200 people in this Zoom,  
their little faces — or, as in this case  
over 80% have their own cameras off —  
just white names on black backgrounds —  
what do these people think happens  
In a school? Do they think we are all  
Just worker ants, marching along,  
lock step, all curricular activities  
the same, being met and performed the  
same way. Or to put it another way,  
do they have this collective hive mind  
thinking schools are safe because  
they read it in their Facebook feed?

Ecology —

Have they never met a teenager  
or a group of them working in  
concert? Do they not remember  
the PDAs In the hallways, the sitting  
together outside classrooms, the  
packed stairwells. Students  
clump. They cluster. They take  
back their agency when they can

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to oppose the dreaded seating charts  
and forced group work so often  
imposed upon them.

Epidemiology —

And yet everyone now is an  
expert on this disease, on  
The effectiveness of masks  
or face coverings, and yet,  
still, we see so many people  
wearing them incorrectly,  
noses out, just hanging in the  
wind, — or, perish the thought —  
not wearing one at all, believing  
it is their constitutional right  
to spread their (possible) infections  
to anyone and everyone to whom  
they see fit.

So, yeah, we come to Epistemology.  
That's right. I said it — hard emphasis  
on the second syllable — because  
I'm angry now — waiting on pins  
and needles — our very own bug  
board — for these seven people  
to do what's right, what makes the  
most sense and is safest for everyone

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VALENCIA-PATE, BARBARA EDLER, BETSY JONES, DENISE  
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involved. So, I wait, listening  
for the roll call that will determine  
my fate,  
which, of course,  
is from Latin  
meaning 'that which  
has been spoken.'

# PROSE POEM WITH A HORSE



SCOTT MCCLOSKEY

You can lead a high school senior to poetry but you can't make him drink. I want to sidestep (or sidepass, as the case may be) the problematic imagery of student as horse, but I can't, because it's at the root of the issue — there I go switching again — so it goes (shout out to Vonnegut Jr.), so yesterday, really, yesterday, as in the day before today, this aforementioned horse student (centaur?) says he didn't like the poem we read, didn't think "words of encouragement" were enough in the world, if you wanted to help someone you should give them a hand or, even better, give them money, not write some dumb poem. Wait, so, does this poor creature really think that Nikki Giovanni is talking about

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spiders? Or e.e. cummings and a mouse? Or Maxine Kumin and woodchucks? Or, perish the thought, but that Elizabeth Bishop just really liked to fish? Stafford's poem is NOT about a (pregnant) dead doe on the side of the road. I mean, yes, of course it is, of course they are, but they are all about so much more. So much more. We're talking about "imaginary gardens" with "real toads" in them here! And hat tip to WCW because we overlook that to our peril, and, I think, it was this, that my student didn't understand, he is just scratching the surface, pawing his hoof on the ground to mimic the arithmetic of logic, but not digging deeper, not plumbing his inner depths, which is, ultimately, perhaps, what great poetry can do for us (to hold a "mirror up to nature" and show us the inmost part of ourselves), and I realize that amidst all the craziness and horror of this current moment — this is my job, this is what I signed on for, so I roll up my sleeves, mop my brow — what? thinking about the work is sometimes more exhausting than the work itself — grab for Seamus Heaney's spade and start to dig.

Slaughter-House Five by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

"Allowables" by Nikki Giovanni

"Me Up at Does" by e.e. cummings

"Woodchucks" by Maxine Kumin

"The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop



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“Traveling through the Dark” by William Stafford

“Poetry” by Marianne Moore

“Asphodel, That Greeny Flower” by William Carlos  
Williams

Hamlet by Shakespeare

“Digging” by Seamus Heaney

Note from Scott about the poem: And the poem  
he didn’t “like”? “The Miracle of Morning” by  
Amanda Gorman



# (RE)LOOKING



SCOTT MCCLOSKEY

I have a confession.

I don't really like Wallace Stevens.  
I know, right? I'm a monster.

I can appreciate his place  
in capital "L" literature; I just don't  
know if I understand it — his poetry,  
not his place (but, I guess, I don't under-  
stand that either).

I've tried, believe me,  
I've taken classes on modern poetry,  
I've read half a biography on the dude,  
listened to lectures and podcasts  
raving about his "Anecdote of the  
Jar" (which seems like he just didn't  
pick up after himself. It seems, to all  
accounts, that Wallace is just a litter

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bug. He left a jar in Tennessee  
and wrote a poem about it. Cool.) or  
his “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” (which, yes,  
I guess is about a prostitute or something,  
sure, but it has nothing to do with Rocky Road  
or Ben and Jerry’s Chunky Monkey) and  
this leads me to his blackbird poem,  
the one about “looking.”

(I’d much rather, to be honest, spend my time  
listening to “Blackbird” by The Beatles —  
which I currently am, by the way, — and  
“Blackbird fly into the light of a dark black  
night” is so much better than “I was of three  
minds, / Like a tree / In which there are  
three blackbirds.” What?! LOL. Seems  
like lazy writing, Wallace.)

(I mean, I know, I know,  
he’s Mr. Wallace Stevens,  
preeminent American poet, heralded in countless  
hallowed halls, winner of the Pulitzer Prize  
in 1955, and, I, on the other hand,  
once had a poem in the local college’s lit mag, so  
we’re on equal footing, is what I’m trying to say.)

And my thoughts are as valued (and valuable?)  
as his, if reader-response literary criticism is  
to be believed, but this is not what I’m  
thinking about at the moment.

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What I'm thinking about at the moment  
is why am I in an office hour Zoom call  
all by myself.

I've got the Zoom window open, and I'm  
looking at myself, looking at myself, contemplating  
the choices that I made to get here.

Don't get excited,  
they're nothing heady  
nor profound.

I was just wondering about "looking." And about  
Wallace Stevens. When I felt a tickle in  
my nose — my left nostril to be exact — so I  
tilted my head backward and flared those  
suckers for all they're worth

when I realized  
that I didn't hit pause  
on the recording.

So now, there's film of me checking  
my nose on camera and I wonder, not  
for the first time mind you,  
if Edgar Allan Poe had to worry about nose  
hairs or Paul McCartney, or, heaven forbid,  
even Mr. Wallace Stevens himself.

They all have noses, right? And presumably  
they all have hairs in their, respective, noses.

So did, say, Sylvia Plath, ever, mid thought, mid  
sentence even, hold her pen aloft (line of verse

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momentarily forgotten) crane her head backward,  
eyes gently closed as if to ward off a sneeze,  
only to vigorously rub her nose trying to dislodge  
a foreign body?

Had Emily Dickinson ever wondered aloud,  
“Because I could not stop for Death —  
He kindly stopped for WHAT IS IN MY NOSE?!”

I can almost picture Wallace digging his  
meaty fingers into each nostril — forefinger  
and thumb vying for purchase — to forcefully  
tug on his nasal septum, all the while, thinking,  
Can I write a poem about a wayward nose  
hair?

These are the things I think about when I’m  
sitting in a Zoom ‘room’ by myself, staring at  
myself, staring at myself

until, of course, I realize I am an hour early  
for the meeting.

# WASHING HANDS



SCOTT MCCLOSKEY

They say that all poems are  
political; all poems are  
an expression of freedom  
against oppression are  
innately radical. Their  
mere “existence is  
resistance.”

But not this one.

This one is just about me  
washing my hands  
and how sometimes I lose  
count, so I need to start  
over to ensure that

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I've done it for the proper  
length of time.

Hands lathered up, I stare  
out the kitchen window  
at the neighbor's house,  
at my neighbor who, although  
it's the middle of December,  
and sure, it is unseasonably  
warm, looks to be planting fake  
flowers in the sills outside  
of her windows.

This is the same neighbor  
who was surprised when her  
racist lawn ornaments were  
stolen this past summer  
when yet more videos  
of atrocities and injustices  
were going viral,

which, of course, makes me  
scrub more vigorously, thinking  
of the UPS package that came,  
the actual reason that I'm standing  
here in the kitchen —  
Was that one thousand seventeen  
or eighteen? —

So, I apply more soap from the  
hands free dispenser, and



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watch, transfixed, as she carefully,  
artistically even, places various  
colors and kinds together, creating,  
to her mind at least, a pleasing  
arrangement, taking more care  
and effort to arrange these fake  
flowers than she has ever  
afforded her neighbors.

And I just wanted to wash my  
hands, wanted to not (potentially)  
infect my wife or myself, wanted  
to simply go about my business,  
maybe read a little, grade an essay  
or two,

but I keep thinking  
about the sad fact that  
cultivation does take  
time and effort and  
persistence, and,  
for some, it really  
is easier to arrange  
plastic flowers  
than to plant  
and nurture  
live ones.

ALEX BERKLEY

# A SPRING CREDO



ALEX BERKLEY

Happiness is easy  
Like the still weeds we saw  
Standing in a pond that looked like  
Green Jell-O  
The geese with their feet in the air  
Fishing under a sun that seemed to be  
Hurtling towards the surface  
    If I hear nothing but your laughter  
And our puppy's snores  
For the rest of my life  
I'll miss music, for sure  
But I guess I'd be okay  
    We walked back on a muddy path  
With our baby son on your back  
Deer watching with placid fear  
    The humans here are okay, they say

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Except maybe that guy on the bench  
Who has the mild look of a serial killer  
But perhaps we're stereotyping  
And he's probably a fine guy  
Just enjoying the sunshine

# THEN



ALEX BERKLEY

Then,  
We walked  
Finally  
Back to real life  
Weeks told in headlines:  
“People Free To Do Things”  
“Life To Be White Noise Again”  
Papers sell like hotcakes today  
But I notice eyes searching the sky  
Waiting for metaphorical asteroids



# BLUE EYES



ALEX BERKLEY

You have blue eyes  
clearly from your mother  
since my eyes are brown.

And I always thought  
everyone in my family  
had brown eyes  
until you were born  
and my mom pointed out  
my dad's eyes are bright blue too.

Sometimes in the mornings  
you look at me from your crib  
with narrowed eyes and a furrowed brow.

You look so grumpy to be waking up  
but it's like,  
kid,  
it's not even 6am

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and your mama and I have  
no problem with you staying  
asleep for another hour.

But those blue eyes are piercing.  
They remind me of my dad  
in old black and white photos  
from the '60s  
when he was relatively new too.

When your eyes laugh  
it is your mama's laughter  
echoing across a canyon of time.

I don't see me yet  
but I don't need to.

You are everyone I love.



# DAY ONE



We sat in  
The yard on  
A blanket while  
Clem crawled around  
Exploring  
A uniquely warm March  
Afternoon  
    The winters  
Can be so  
Long  
    But when  
The Sun starts  
To shine  
    Everyone starts to  
Barbecue and play  
Music on old boomboxes  
In their yards

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And everyone starts to  
Drink with  
A celebratory tone  
In stark contrast to  
Our February drinking  
Which is done purely  
To beat back  
The misery  
Of brown snow on  
The roadside and  
God's gray  
Middle finger  
Up in the sky  
I watched Clem's face  
As he studied  
A twig in his fingers  
And I thought about  
Thursday  
When I  
Stopped at a red light  
And received a  
Washington Post update  
On my phone:  
Ohio was closing  
All  
Of their schools  
It took

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Until Monday morning  
For New York to  
Shut  
Down  
    Karen walked into the backyard  
With a bag of popcorn  
And two bowls  
    “In true social distancing fashion”  
She said  
Handing one bowl  
To Kayleigh  
    We all sipped  
Wine and looked up at a blue  
Sky when I felt my phone  
Buzz again:  
    “California issues stay at  
Home order in the  
Bay area”  
    I felt calm.  
    I texted Sean  
In San Francisco  
    I watched Clem  
Crawling faster towards  
The gate  
    I felt Spring in  
My lungs  
And I tried to understand

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That this  
Was only the  
Beginning  
    But to see  
A beginning  
In relation to some  
Unknown end  
Through a chasm of time  
That doesn't even exist yet  
    Well,  
Where do you even  
Begin?  
    I took  
A handful of popcorn  
And finished  
My wine  
    This was only  
Day One

# PUSHING A STROLLER



ALEX BERKLEY

In the aftermath of a rainy day  
Paints a little portrait of the zeitgeist  
    The runners who  
Curve onto the road  
Keeping six feet distance  
    The angry bald man  
With a mask hanging round his neck  
(And black knee socks reaching to his shorts)  
Yelling at a barking dog through somebody's  
window  
    The park so beautiful and green  
Dotted yellow with dandelions  
Kids rapping while riding bikes

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Making weird eye contact through windshields

Expressions masked

And we walk the loop round the perimeter

And there's an old man smoking and eating a  
sandwich

There are people walking dogs

Couples holding hands

Before you know it, there's actually some blue in  
the sky

Like Bob Ross just changed his mind about  
something

I watch Clem stretching in the stroller

It's actually getting hot

I take off his hat

And push the stroller home

JENNIFER  
SYKES

# HELLO PANDEMIC



JENNIFER SYKES

Covid-19  
Global Pandemic  
Fear of the unknown  
Haunts our minds  
Yet some seem unscathed  
Think it's all a hoax  
Is this real? Will it "all go away"?  
I will be prepared.  
I'll go with my gut.

THIS JUST IN: National State of Emergency  
Thank God I followed my gut  
Never trust the ignorant.  
Everything's different, yet  
The mind persists,



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Still fearing.

The Anxieties of February well within reach,  
While Nightmares of March introduce themselves  
To the Succubus of April,  
occupying the empty desk  
At the front of my virtual classroom  
I snicker at the vision,  
But I'm not even sleeping.



# ENDING AMONG COMFORT



JENNIFER SYKES

Trust in the Lord  
Trust that an ending  
Ending is a beginning  
Beginning new ways of teaching  
Teaching unfamiliar ways of learning  
Learning meaningful lessons  
Lessons of staying still  
Still is the only way to move  
Move forward during this time  
Time seems to be crawling  
Crawling further  
Further into the unknown  
Unknown to humankind  
Humankind finds solitude

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Solitude in the stillness  
Stillness in quarantine  
Quarantine allows new experiences  
Experiences between parents and their children  
Children and their school teachers  
Teachers become students  
Students overnight  
Overnight developing lessons  
Lessons from a distance  
Distance unsought  
Unsought and unbearable  
Unbearable to see your friends  
Friends and teachers on a screen  
Screen creates a barrier  
A barrier that protects  
Protects yet causes grief  
Grief of separation  
Separation from those you love  
Love transforms  
Transforms into enrichment  
Enrichment in art, music, reading, and writing  
Writing crayoned messages and friendly letters  
Letters with paintings and stories  
Stories read on front porches  
Porches that clasp those deliveries  
Deliveries of outstretched arms  
Arms that carry invisible hugs

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Hugs that provide strength  
Strength for the journey  
Journey into the unknown  
Unknown we must accept  
Accept and seek comfort  
Comfort and grace  
Grace that is necessary  
Necessary  
Grace



# WORLD AWAKENS



JENNIFER SYKES

The world awakens  
buds of yellow, green, and pink  
Start to peak out from their hiding places  
Beads of rain rest on the reclining sticks,  
Victims of the sleds that pummeled over them  
While resting.  
Daily walks to the mailbox  
Bring recycling bin food,  
And the whisper of poppy hellos and lily bulb  
salutations  
Bring a much needed smile to my face.  
A chill catches me off guard  
While the sun's rays stroke my spine  
Warmth.

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Finds its home and  
Decides to stay a bit longer each night.  
Raindrops dot the ground  
stirring up the dust  
The smell of wet soil, and rotting worms  
That couldn't find their way back  
Escort me on my return  
Preparing the way for summer lust.  
It will be here soon.  
It must!



GLEND A FUNK

AFTER VIEWING  
“YOUNG BOYS  
HARASSING THE  
FIRST AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
FAMILY TO MOVE  
INTO THE  
ALL-WHITE  
NEIGHBORHOOD”



GLEND A FUNK

Last night I dreamed I saw a

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young Don harassing the first  
African American family  
moving into his all-white  
neighborhood. He stretched  
tiny fists in raised rage,  
spittle foaming from his mouth—  
a circle wrapped around his hate—  
bellowing a bubbling brew,  
feeding a klan of creepy kids,  
misfits like him from a  
Flannery O'Connor short story  
who believe in jesus and justice,  
just not the god of love. His  
barbed-wire words stretch  
like a cabled line reaching across  
history into infinity,  
still measuring others  
not by *the content of their*  
*character but by the color of*  
*their skin*, their *shit-hole* homes.  
Now a squinting shadow  
stands spewing and shoveling  
the same slop, while  
around the resolute desk  
the boys swarm.  
*He ain't learned nothing.*  
And so it goes.

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Who knew in this  
child a good man  
would be so  
hard to find?

Note from Glenda about the poem: \*Additional  
inspiration from Eve Ewing's "I saw Emmitt Till this  
week at the grocery store," and Lorraine Hansbury's  
"A Raisin in the Sun."

# SIMULTANEOUS CONCURRENT ACTION



GLEND A FUNK

Bodies  
belonging to no one:  
Unclaimed  
Anonymous  
Alien lifeless forms  
Abandoned,  
Left like  
Refuse stacked  
Awaiting burial in  
Mass graves on  
Hart Island—  
Interred by

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Hazmat suit-clad diggers.

Meanwhile...

Covid-19 infected

Nurses—

First Responders—

Tend the infirm,

Themselves gravely

Ill—infected—

Unable to procure

PPE through

Flatlined supply chains

Unlinked==broken==disconnected;

Vital skills more

Requisite than

Vital signs.

# POETRY SHIFTS



GLEND A FUNK

First the morning crew arrives  
Eager wordsmiths,  
Morning birds  
Pecking about the nest,  
Excited for the daily  
Worm, prompts dangling before  
Hungry ravenous beaks;  
Fluttering hummingbirds  
Sucking nectar-engorged lines  
They flit and fly in and  
Out of the nest as  
Sundials twirl, words swirl.

Dusk yawns and  
Stretches its tired rays  
Across a pink horizon  
Signaling an awakening;

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Night owls emerge in  
Silent flight & nestle in the nest.  
They hoot and perch on  
High canto branches;  
Their hawkish eyes revolve,  
Clocking, Observing,  
Expelling feathery runes of  
Poesy upon a word-wonder world.



LAURYL  
BENNINGTON

# SKIN



Smooth, perfect, porcelain skin  
But it wasn't mine.  
Mine was freckled with red dots  
Varying in size and space.  
I stared at the large picture on Vogue's cover;  
I glared in the overwhelming mirror in my  
bathroom.  
I compared the two images.  
Even though there isn't a book on what beauty is or  
means,  
I always knew that wasn't me.  
My mom tells me not to worry,  
"You'll grow out of it," she says.  
But what usually only happens to teens  
Still happens to me as an adult.  
My family all share olive tones and even textures.  
My skin is scarred and cracking under the pressure,

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but somehow increasingly oily at the same time.  
Medicine bottles and ointments crowd my  
bathroom counter.  
Still full from weeks without use.  
They never work anyways.  
Tears fall rapidly into my large oval pores.  
If only those were a magical serum;  
My skin would be flawless and glowing.



# INTROVERT



Introverted personality,  
I always longed for my alone time.  
Every time I was stuck in a crowd  
Stiff, uncomfortable, just wanting to go home  
Curl up with a book  
And my own simple thoughts.  
Now my thoughts are too much alone  
I find myself reaching for the phone  
Begging for connection that I loathed before  
The touch of a hand,  
The brush of a shoulder,  
Even a hug.  
Why oh why did you always want to be alone  
Was it because you had a choice to be with people  
Was it because you actually wanted to be alone  
Now it seems  
My longing has changed from one to many



# COFFEE



Having a morning coffee with you  
is something we've never done,  
But I can picture it perfectly.  
Laughter would echo as you poured,  
Steam would rise from the mug,  
Yours would be black and mine a light brown.  
We'd be sitting criss-cross on the couch,  
Windows open letting in the breeze,  
Sipping lightly as the caffeine awakens us.  
Maybe someday we can share a morning coffee.  
Until then, I'll enjoy this cup of joe on my own  
thinking of you.





# DEAR LAURYL



At fifteen you wanted to be an actress on Broadway, or even better at the West End. Even before then, you wanted to be a journalist but always had a knack for too much detail that journalism would never allow. While some paths have now taken you down different directions you wouldn't change where your life is now and where you are headed. You should've always known you were going to become a teacher after you played school every day as a child and you were never the designated student.

At fifteen you blasted Taylor Swift love songs in the passenger seat of your mom's green Ford Broncho as if you had been heartbroken by a million different boys. Nothing felt more cathartic than blasting "White Horse" down I-35 with the windows slightly cracked and hair flying in a

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multitude of different directions. Your music taste has definitely changed now, but you still crave that highway drive. It's only you and the road now though.

At fifteen you were hurt by too many mean girls in school, but just hold on a little longer until you are able to reach your life-long best friends in college. Everything you went through before will be worth the torture just to even meet these wonderful people. You will feel like you've known them your whole life and college will fly by in the blink of an eye.

At fifteen you could've never envisioned how your life is now. How different things are from your imagination. I think if there is one lesson you should carry with you is to expect the unexpected and to embrace change. Change is the only constant now. I know you are a control freak and love to be in charge of everything, but sometimes it's okay to just go with the flow. Embrace everything in life: the good, the bad, and the wildly fanciful and unexpected.

Best wishes,  
Lauryl

# TIME LIMERICK



There is a man who is named time.  
He is quite fond of doing crime.  
Thievery more so;  
Prying in to cause woe.  
Hear him now. His incessant chime.

## TEACHER-POETS

Abigail M. Woods is 21 years old and currently attends Oklahoma State University; she is anticipating graduation in December of 2021. She is studying Secondary English Education and minoring in English (Creative Writing). She has been working in education for four years with all age groups. Abigail spends her summers working at Camp Waldo in West Virginia. She spends her free time hiking with her dog McGee, hammocking with a good book, and fishing from her kayak. Abigail has previously been published in *Dissonance Magazine* and will have work appearing in the *Red Dirt 2021 Anthology*.

Alex Berkley is a high school special education teacher from Buffalo, New York. He has been teaching for 7 years. Alex is also a singer/songwriter with several self-released albums available on his Bandcamp page. He likes to implement music in his curriculum because of its success with his students’

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performance. He enjoys spending time with his wife and son.

Allison Berryhill teaches English and journalism in Atlantic, Iowa. She is a publications-coordinator for the Iowa Council of Teachers of English. Her sonnets have been awarded first place in the Iowa Poetry Association's Lyrical Iowa competition in 2019 and 2020. Her 2020 sonnet was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Follow her on Twitter @allisonberryhil for photos of #IowaSky and [schoolblazing.blogspot.com](http://schoolblazing.blogspot.com) for essays, where she has been chronicling over 300 days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andy Schoenborn is an award-winning author and high school English teacher in Michigan at Mt. Pleasant Public Schools. He focuses his work on progressive literacy methods including student-centered critical thinking, digital collaboration, and professional development. He is a past-president of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, teacher consultant for the Chippewa River Writing Project, and Region Rep for the Michigan Reading Association. His first book, co-authored with Dr. Troy Hicks, *Creating Confident Writers* was published in 2020. Follow him on Twitter @aschoenborn.

Angelica Braaten is from Dallas, Texas and taught

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high school English in Louisiana for 5 years. She decided she wanted to teach internationally and ended up moving to Dhaka, Bangladesh. Ms. Braaten is currently teaching middle school English at International School Dhaka. She has incorporated more poetry in her classroom and has had a great response from her students.

Anna J. Small Roseboro, a National Board Certified Teacher has over four decades of experience in public, private schools and colleges, mentoring early career educators, facilitating leadership institutes, in five states. She has served as director of summer programs and chair of her English department, published six textbooks based on these experiences, and was awarded Distinguished Service Awards by the California Association of Teachers of English and the National Council of Teachers of English. Her poetry appears in several issues of *Fine Lines: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (2015-2020) and has published *Experience Poems and Pictures: Poetry that Paints/Pictures that Speak* (2019).

Ashley Valencia-Pate currently resides in Perkins, Oklahoma. Over the past four years, Ashey has taught English at Stillwater High School. She felt a calling for teaching from a very early age through storytelling. She enjoys her school environment and

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being part of the community. She advocates for flexible curriculum and the growth that develops in students.

Barb Edler has taught English for the last forty years in Iowa, the last thirty in Keokuk where she encouraged students to find their own voice while taking risks, coaching speech participants, and supporting NHD competitors. Although retiring from teaching at Keokuk in 2020, she remains active instructing college composition courses. Barb enjoys watching the Mississippi roll by, reading, writing, playing cards, watching birds, and appreciating the simple things in life.

Betsy Jones lives and teaches in Moultrie, Georgia. In her ninth year as a full-time teacher, Betsy is currently an Academic Coach and 7th grade ELA Remote Learning teacher; she has taught Literature/Composition and Drama to 9th through 11th graders. Before accepting the call to become a teacher, she supervised tutoring programs in California; waited tables in South Georgia cafes; mentored students for high school graduation; taught English in Tegucigalpa, Honduras; and managed an independent bookstore. She is a life-long reader, writer, and self-professed “word nerd.”

Denise Hill is a Michigander who ventured to Oregon for a few years before returning to the

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Mitten State. She has been in education in one way or another since kindergarten and hopes to close on thirty years as a college English teacher. Denise is also Editor of NewPages.com, an online resource for readers and writers, where she curates publication and contest guides for young writers.

Denise Krebs has been writing poetry with students for decades. However, last April was the first time she joined other teachers in a poetry-writing community, the first time she embraced the practice herself. Denise holds a master's degree in elementary education with a concentration in teaching reading. She teaches English to Arabic-speaking fifth graders in the first modern school in Bahrain, which started in 1899. Her one word for 2020 was TIME. Little did she know the Coronavirus would give her more time to just be. Besides enjoying the solitude and relaxing after too many years of so much doing, she also keeps busy reading, telling Bible stories, cooking and baking. Follow her on Twitter at @mrsdkrebs.

Donnetta Norris resides in Mansfield, Texas, and is a 2nd grade teacher with ArlingtonISD. She has been an educator for the last 12 years. She is a graduate of Bowling Green State University (BSBA), Webster University (MAHRM), and Western Governors University (Post-Baccalaureate Teaching



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Certification). She is passionate about, and committed to, improving her writing craft as a teacher-writer., as well as a writing teacher. She is a community leader and facilitates workshops with TeachWrite, LLC.

Emily Yamasaki lives in San Diego, California and has been teaching for 10 years in the public school system. She currently teaches sixth grade math and science. Emily studied Psychology and Education at the University of California, San Diego and continued to earn her Masters in Education from University of California, Los Angeles. Emily is a fellow and teacher consultant with the San Diego Area Writing Project with the National Writing Project.

Gayle Sands lives in Taneytown, Maryland, a small town just south of Gettysburg, PA. She retired from 27 rewarding years as an English teacher/Reading Specialist in local middle schools in July of 2020. She earned a 1978 BS in psychology (which allowed her to work in retail) and a career-change MA in Elementary Education. She has always loved words, and writing has been a source of pleasure and pride to her.

Glenda Cowen-Funk retired from a 38 year career as a classroom teacher of English and speech communication. Glenda is a National Board

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Certified Teacher in Young Adulthood English Language Arts. She holds a MA in English literature from Idaho State University. During her career Glenda coached forensics at Highland High School in Pocatello, Idaho, where she taught from 1989-2019. She taught two years in Iowa at Urbana Community School and began her career at Kofa High School in Yuma, Arizona, where she taught from 1981-1984 and 1986-1989. Her experience includes teaching AP Literature and Composition and working as an adjunct instructor for Idaho State U in the Early College Program. Glenda has been blogging since 2010 at <https://evolvingenglishteacher.blogspot.com> and has written for *California English*, but she only began writing poetry in March, 2018.

Jamie Langley teaches in Austin, Texas. She has taught in Austin for more than 25 years. Currently she teaches AP Language and Composition and 9th grade Pre-AP ELA. She teaches at the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, a public girls school in Austin where she also serves as English department chair. Jamie is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and completed course work at the University of Texas in Austin to gain teacher certification. She has been a part of the New Jersey Writing Project in the past and currently a part of

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the National Writing Project through the University of Texas, Heart of Texas Writing Project.

Jennifer Guyor Jowett is an educator from Lansing, Michigan. Having attained her degree from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI, she has taught for thirty years, mainly as a middle school ELA educator. She believes writing is a form of artistic expression and participating in a writing community allows teachers to speak authentically as writers with their students.

Jennifer Sykes, a 14-year veteran of the ELA classroom in Lansing, Michigan, has spent her years so far with 7th and 8th grade students at a large Catholic school. Her love for writing developed in middle school when she was introduced to strong female characters like Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter Series and started imitating poetry of strong female writers like Maya Angelou. Jennifer also finds great inspiration from music and lyrics that follow poetic forms. She believes that giving students the opportunity to write gives them the opportunity to share their voice.

Kate Currie is originally from suburban Chicago and currently resides in Florence, South Carolina. She serves English Department Chair and Associate Athletic Director and teaches juniors and seniors. Also, she serves as an academic advisor for the

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athletic programs. She holds a BA in Literary Studies and a MEd in Secondary English Education from DePaul University. She is currently working on her EdD in Curriculum and Instruction from University of South Carolina.

Katrina Morrison teaches 10th and 12th grade English in Skiatook, Oklahoma. This year marks her 15th year in the classroom. Katrina graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a BA in English and a minor in German. She earned a Master of Science in Higher Education Leadership from Northeastern University in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Katrina loves to read, write, read about writing, and write about reading.

Kimberly Johnson, EdD, is the District Literacy Specialist at Pike County Schools in Zebulon, Georgia. She has taught at all levels from Pre-k through high school. Kim enjoys participating in the monthly Open Writes at [www.ethicalela.com](http://www.ethicalela.com) and sees life's adventures through the lens of written expression.

Maureen Young Ingram lives and writes in Silver Spring, Maryland. She taught preschool for twenty years, and mentored adults in their work with young children. Now retired, she is particularly proud of her years as founding faculty at a Washington, D.C. public charter. Maureen has a M.A. in International

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Studies, a B.A. in Political Science and Russian, and Early Childhood Certification. Maureen enjoys writing poetry about children, family, and nature.

Margaret Simon lives on the Bayou Teche in New Iberia, Louisiana. Margaret has been an elementary school teacher for 34 years and currently teaches ELA to gifted students. She has a masters in Education and National Board Certification. UL Press published her first book of children's poetry, *Bayou Song: Creative Explorations of the South Louisiana Landscape*. Margaret writes a blog regularly at <http://reflectionsontheteche.com>.

Melissa Ali is a coordinator at an elementary school in Los Angeles, California. She is the magnet coordinator, English language development coordinator, Title I coordinator, trauma-informed coordinator, and student empowerment coach. She also works as a consultant to help private schools decolonize their curriculum. Melissa finds relief in her poetry.

Mo Daley has taught preschool through high school, ELA, Spanish, and reading. She is a middle school reading specialist in south suburban Chicago. Mo is a graduate of the University of Illinois and has been teaching for 27 years. She holds masters degrees in English and as a reading specialist. She loves writing and sharing her poetry.

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Monica Schwafaty of Redondo Beach, California has been teaching for 26 years. She teaches 8th grade ELA. Monica has a Bachelor's Degree in English and Portuguese and a Masters Degree in Literary Education. Writing has always been an outlet for her; it's where she escapes to and processes her feelings and thoughts.

Laura Langley lives in Little Rock, AR. She graduated from Hendrix College in 2010 with a Bachelor's in Film Studies and received a Master's in Secondary Education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2017. She is currently in her sixth year of teaching high school English Language Arts and this year she has juniors and seniors in a "blended learning environment." While she has fancied herself as a writer since middle school, she found her confidence as a writing teacher. One of her classroom goals is to help her students find their writing confidence and voices.

Lauryl Bennington is a Secondary Education: English major and pre-service teacher at Oklahoma State University and is from Edmond, Oklahoma. She plans to teach in a middle or high school upon graduation. She connects to writing through music, teaching others poetry, and by journaling constantly!

Linda Mitchell is a family girl, Teacher-Librarian

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in a public middle school and writes when she can get a word in edgewise. She received her BA from Ithaca College, MS from State University of New York at Geneseo and a certificate from the University of Virginia –Wise. Creative writing is a joy that helps her figure out life.

Sarah J. Donovan, Ph.D., is the founder of Ethical ELA. She is a former junior high language arts teacher of fifteen years and current assistant professor of secondary English education at Oklahoma State University. She is the author of *Genocide Literature in Middle and Secondary Classrooms* (2016) and the young adult novel in verse, *Alone Together* (2018). Her research includes ethical, inclusive curriculum, methods, and assessment practices in literacy education. She has contributed chapters to *The Best Lesson Series: Writing* (Talks with Teachers, 2018), *Queer Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the English Language Arts Curriculum* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), *Moving Beyond Loss to Societal Grieving* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), and *Contending with Gun Violence in the English Language Classroom* (Routledge, 2019); and *Unsettling Education: Searching for Ethical Footing in a Time of Reform* (Peter Lang, 2019).

Scott McCloskey, from Monroe, Michigan, has

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been teaching English Language Arts at the secondary level for 26 years and as a part-time adjunct at a community college for 20 years. When not in the classroom, he enjoys reading and writing and spending time with his wife. He writes (and reads) poetry because he has yet found no better way to understand himself or humanity than by reading and writing poetry.

Seana Hurd Wright is from Los Angeles, CA. Seana has been teaching for 30 years primarily in the Elementary sector. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and has taught all grades yet prefers upper grades. She has been fascinated with writing since Middle School and actually wrote a soap opera-ish novel with a friend in 7th grade that was silly yet exhilarating. Writing has always been natural and easy for her and she's grateful to be able to share her thoughts in this anthology.

Shaun Ingalls lives in Las Vegas, Nevada and is entering his 25th year of teaching. Shaun currently teaches high school English. He received his BA in English with a minor in Middle East Studies from the University of Utah, completed his Secondary Education degree and Theatre education endorsement from Westminster College, and received his M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from University of Nevada Las Vegas. Writing during the



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pandemic has been a way for him to connect with others and better understand himself.

Stacey Joy, a native of Los Angeles, California, has been an elementary school teacher for 35 years. Stacey is a National Board Certified Teacher and currently teaches multiple subjects in 5th grade. She received her bachelor's degree from U.C.L.A. and her master's degree from C.S.U.D.H. Stacey has been writing poetry most of her life but being a fellow of the U.C.L.A. Writing Project helped her connect her writing with her teaching practice.

Stefani Boutelier, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Education at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI. Most of her K-12 classroom teaching was at the secondary level in Southern California but she has worked at all levels of education for nearly 20 years. Her published works are in both academic and creative genres.

Susan Ahlbrand is in her 34th year of teaching 8th grade ELA in the small southern Indiana town of Jasper. A 1988 graduate of Indiana University, she has always written along with her students. That habit was heightened during the Covid 19 stay-at-home order when she fully participated in #verselove (an online poetry-writing community) as a way of processing the multitude of emotions being experienced.

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Susie Morice, a retired educator in St. Louis, Missouri, has been working in various capacities in the field of education. She is a 30-year veteran of the public classroom and was a district leader in language literacy and gifted education. She has taught English Language Arts at the middle school, high school and college levels. Upon retiring from the classroom, she continued to consult in the areas of teaching writing, editing, and transformational school leadership. Though she always keeps writing and editing for academic publications on her desk, Susie has been, at heart, a lifetime poet. She is active with various poetry organizations and loves the intersection of composing music and lyrics with her poetry writing.

Tamara Belko is a middle school English Teacher, Gifted Intervention Specialist and Creative Writing coach. She has been in education for fifteen years sharing her love of reading, writing and poetry with her students. Tamara holds a Masters of Education from Ashland University and lives in Rocky River, Ohio with her husband and three children. When she isn't reading or writing, she can be found listening to music or hiking with her family.