

THE ART OF ISOLATION

AN ANTHOLOGY OF
POETRY AND ART

ST GEORGE LITERARY ARTS FESTIVAL

THE ART OF ISOLATION - 2020



With depth, variety and quality, the artwork reproduced in this deceptively slender volume adds testimony to the concept that art saves lives. At once universal and personal, the poetry and artwork hold hands, strengthening both.

*Fae Ellsworth, MFA
Visual Artist*

A visual collection of Covid 19 sentiments on canvas -to enlighten and entertain during a time of chaos and fear.

*Kathy Ciezlewick
Director, Sears Gallery*

With large gatherings banned under Covid 19, the annual guidelines for the SGLAF had to be reimagined for 2020. In providing an alternative for nurturing literary arts in our community during a time of immeasurable fear and enormous loss, the solution: *The Art of Isolation*, an anthology of original work from poets and artists who drew on their unique and invaluable insights and life under the "New Normal." The Outcome: Pages worth savoring.

*Christopher Jones, CPA, Phd
Treasurer, Heritage Writers Guild*

From primitive cave wall images to the words of poets, human experience has always been expressed. This compilation of poetry and art rises in response to the unfamiliar circumstance and chaos of 2020. Read with an eye focused upon challenge and recovery. Life resonates through these pages.

*Candy Lish Fowler
USPS Poet of the Year -2019*

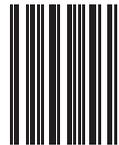


www.stgeorgelitartsfest.org

ISBN 978-0-578-80799-7



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THE ART OF ISOLATION

An Anthology of Poetry and Art

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Print ISBN 978-0-578-80799-7

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FOREWORD

The St. George Literary Arts Festival 2020 was plagued with endless roadblocks because of COVID 19. Keynote speakers and presenters found travel impossible, venues were unable to accommodate social distancing, our planning efforts were met with consistent dreary endings.

In lieu of the festival, a book was conceived as an artistic historic compilation to record events of the pandemic. Poets and artists contributed unique and invaluable insights of courage and isolation. Unlike the 1918 flu epidemic that also masked society as it killed thousands, this project brings unique personal commentary and visual presentations to light in a time of immeasurable fear and enormous loss.

Literary contributions for this publication are from members of St. George literary organizations i.e., Heritage Writers Guild, Dixie Poets, Red Rock Writers, League of Utah Writers and Utah State Poetry Society, whose memberships span beyond the state of Utah. We extend our gratitude for the gift of their writing efforts in behalf of this publication.

A COVID art exhibition — already in place at the Sears Gallery on DSUs campus — was reproduced with permission from artists to add an artistic element to our story..

The Art of Isolation comes to life, gasping for clean air, requiring the help of many midwives, to find its place in history.

Sue Stevenson Leth
SGLAF, Exec. Dir.

REMEMBERING 2020

Let us gather here where we are no longer in isolation reading this book, where we see each other's heartaches, where we touch each other's souls, where we hear each other's pleas. Let us break the bread of the word so we nurture each other, healing the many wounds we each have endured in 2020.

Let us gather here to share the bread of these tales of tragedy, loss and despair in our lives. Let us meet here with compassion and empathy in our hearts, knowing we are not the only ones, knowing we are not alone in our suffering. The year 2020 asked much of us, to dig deeper, to search within ourselves for survival skills we did not know we possessed.

We gather to remember all those in our community whom we have lost to COVID-19 who are no longer with us, whose smile we will miss, whose presence we no longer enjoy. Let us honor the lives of our loved ones who were snatched from us in such an untimely manner - grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, baby siblings. We will never forget our lost beloved ones.

We gather to pay tribute to frontline caregivers who have dedicated their lives to tend to all those who are stricken with COVID-19. We are profoundly grateful to doctors, nurses, orderlies, and support staff who place their lives on the line and who work overtime each day to heal the sick and the afflicted. Thank you.

Let us gather here in our community to listen to each other, to reach out to others in need, to find peace within ourselves. Let us eat the bread of these words to be nourished in body and spirit, to be healed so we can thrive, supporting each other. We shall never forget the year we survived the Great Pandemic of 2020.

Marie Tollstrup
Heritage Writers Guild

Cinnamon in a Pandemic

I hope the cinnamon gone from the store shelves
is blessing those who have it,

that its ancient exotic balm
makes pungent explosions
in cookies, cakes, casseroles,

dusts arms and noses,
kicks powdery comfort into batters. I hope

its earthy reds toss, partner,
and tumble
into the turbulence of bubbling puddings,
meat pies, oatmeal,

onto buttered toast waffles,
applesauce, that its contagious well-being

cobbles with blueberries and peaches,
lifts chicken and lamb,

that it twirls and flies, seeps
into cracks of whorled rolls,

hums, spills,
feverishly pours over ice cream,
buttered nuts, and rice,

pushing through the insight
and the nonsense of the news.

I hear its satin, time-worn voice,
Come, Worried Ones
in each dash of warmed milk, cocoa, tea.

Open the windows, let it wander
the gray, too-quiet neighborhoods,

let it sift its glory, its puffs of goodness over us,
let it sustain us all.

Marilyn Bushman Carlson



Graebner, Diane, "We Have To Do It!"
Mixed Media

Paused

I decide to move more
slowly, consciously taking my time
emptying the dishwasher one plate
into the cupboard, one fork into the drawer,

walk across to place a single cup on a shelf
then remember I've been meaning to clean
the stovetop, pause the putting away
and clean – remove the knobs, the cast

iron burner grates, spray on cleanser
and wipe away debris – now return
to the previous task, realizing
how intentional I must be to not focus

on efficiency, how well I have trained
myself to never waste a second
to plan every future moment to
never miss a thing; I slip

my running shoes on, now
just for strolling, select something long
to listen to, gradually make my way
down the sidewalk, onto the path

and down the hill to the convenience store
and yes, I typically drive, because the hill
is steep and on most days
seems more than I can manage

at the pace I like to keep, but today
I shorten my stride, walk to prevent
joint pressure, ease my way down
then on the return, ease my way up

as if I've no other thing to do, as if life is
paused and I'm the only one in the world.

Trish Hopkinson

Viral Woes

It's been how many weeks as the home dweller seeks
to find normal in chaos and dread?
I am cooped up at home as I write this sad poem,
but I'd rather be mobile instead.

Dining out is a no. There is no place to go.
Entertainment has dried up and gone.
If the weather is good, in my sweatshirt and hood
I can walk out and sit on my lawn.

I have seen around town that gas prices are down.
It's like high school all over again.
Our emotions run deep. Though petroleum is cheap
we are grounded and stuck with our kin.

The homeschooling's a bust. Learning's left in the dust.
Though I've tried it is one big regret.
Junior's not of a mind to be serious I find,
little bugger's called in a bomb threat.

Personal grooming's regressed as our hair looks distressed.
Barber visits no longer are made.
Cutting my husband's hair has left some spots quite bare.
You can't tell, if he stands in the shade.

The TP is well stocked, being wasteful is blocked.
It is cherished unlike a poor waif.
It once spun like a wheel in a drag racing squeal.
Now I roll as if cracking a safe.

Grocery shopping is rife with huge threats to one's life.
We must now wear a mask as we hunt.
In my Zorro-like guise I prepare and devise
battle plans as I walk to the front.

Several shelves are still bare as I'm working to snare
groceries without thought to the price.
Are hens laying no eggs? Seems the yeast has grown legs
and absconded with pasta and rice.

In my own homey spot, there's a great garden plot
that I've planted with beets, peas, and beans.
I will later add squash we'll enjoy as we nosh
on the cucs and the lush, leafy greens



**Last, Cassandra, "And So This Is Life"
Acrylic**

I will have all I need to prepare a big feed
when the veggies yield up what they give.
If this virus hangs on, we will still be its pawn. . .
Never mind! Just forget where I live!

Marleen Bussma

Masked

We look like bandits
furtively checking right and left
who's eying us in turn.

Some clinical blue and white, some
florals, stripes and animal prints
for fashion-wise concealment,
medical is social, acceptance grows legal.

We take the bandit guise with varied zeal,
stealing looks and muffling judgments.

Resistant once as Shadrach,
I complain of stale heat
issued from my own lungs' furnace
but chosen over the crowd's
King Nebuchadnezzar eyes.

Barbara J. Funke

Quarantine . . . 88

I visit an old friend. Smooth as marble,
I touch cool ivory.
It responds with the melancholy
of an ancient Ponderosa longing for rain.

My right hand stretches higher.
The satin surface rings with each quick touch.
Fingers play the deep ache

of standing alone in a far-as the-eye-can-see wheat field
 where colossal storm clouds gather . . .
the loneliness of a single set of bare footprints
 on an old country road . . .
the bittersweet of one empty glass
 that tattooed a circle on the wooden table top.

My right hand runs trills across white and black
and the sound becomes the cry of door hinges
 in a forgotten house . . .
the mournful keen after the loss of love – the loss of life . . .
the haunting wail of a white wolf luminous in starlight
calling, calling – but there is no moon.

My left hand sweeps hard and low creating the heavy boom
of exploding cannons in the distance.
A softer touch and it becomes the rumbling
 of a midnight train.
Does anyone ride anymore?

My hand stops. Silent. Dead air.

The left begins again; low, deliberate, muffled . . .
the thud of a slowing heart.
Right and left join in a duet touching black and white keys.
Smooth, hard, always bringing the hammer to strings.
Smooth, hard, but they never reach for me.

Fingers pause and I think of things I cannot feel;
the tender kiss of a child, the silk of skin, a lover's embrace.
88 keys play pianissimo: the secret spice we cannot share.
88 keys play a lullaby for the baby I cannot rock.
88 keys fill an empty room where stairs led me here –

alone with 88.

Candy Lish Fowler

Pause

some enormous entity
has pressed the pause button
on the universal remote

to stop a frightful
disease with no cure
and no vaccine
but
I don't have it yet

the best thing is
an opportunity
to pause and consider
what I want to do
with what's left of my life

the worst thing is
an opportunity
to pause and consider
what I want to do
with what's left of my life

Ann Marie Boyden

Cooking in Quarantine

it's like *Chopped*
without the
ten thousand dollars

frozen edamame
canned corn
kinda succotash
canned salmon

beets
carrots
roast 'em
bake a potato

frozen peas
penne pasta
parmesan
condensed milk
black pepper
sorta alfredo

sardines
crisco
soy sauce
pizza sauce
call Grub Hub

Ann Marie Boyden



Manning, Mary, "Mother Goddess Heals Earth"
Acrylic/gold

Pastorale

A mule deer pauses on a hillside above carved stones,
skyscrapers in the background, snowy peaks above,
his large ears erect. Weathervanes, they test breezes

for danger; storms and lightning come at any time.
Some of his mates lie on the ground and others
eat grass among conifers and birches.

As if there were only safety and being together.
In this daytime browse, a garden of loss and hope,
deer are the living, people absent. The stones

all bear a name, someone now gone. Of man styles,
the stones and names suggest red-deer, fallow deer,
sambar, tufted deer, water deer, wapiti, and elk,

not the mule deer settled carefully among stones
lest a cougar or hunter saunter through.
The danger of the names-who-eat-deer is buried

and bogged down in rules and laws, while
norms breakdown like old stones crumbling.
Cougars still tread through lawns and streets.

The pace of new stones has bounded up like deer
bouncing under threat. Backhoes rumble and tear
the grass more often. Cars come to watch, people

distant. The deer turns his head to listen.

David Clark Knowlton

In That Field, Wire Blooms

Barbed wire fell from God-knows where.
It surrounds and pokes whenever we move. It tightens.

“How are you today, Mason,” I asked the bearded, thin clerk in the neighborhood grocery store. At the register he seemed tense. Even frightened. His voice tight: just trying to stay distant. He can’t. Despite mask, gloves, he doesn’t feel safe. He has to scan food, take cards.

Spines of metal knife when I read the news, numbers grow, sharp wire spreads like slime in the tropics after a rain.

Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, has the virus. My neighbors are in quarantine. They don’t know. We don’t know.

In the night the barbed mail scratches. It tightens. I can’t breathe. What if I get the virus. I survived leukemia, but, I don’t know.

What if food can’t get from fields to the stores and I run out? My aunt had a stroke; I can’t go to visit her though she did me. We must stay apart. People are a danger. I see them walking, I’m drawn to talk, but should fear they might carry the disease. I might get sick. I must stay away. I shouldn’t leave my house.

Wire that won the west with spikes; how many times did I slice my pants trying to climb over it stretched between posts?

No longer a fence around pastures and fields, its strands have come loose. They have wrapped together in a wind

And formed a cage, a mail that does not protect as it snags, shreds. At night, it even moves inside. It pierces my veins.

David Clark Knowlton

I THOUGHT

I was dying and couldn't wake.
My mind a fog of swirling dreams.
The waking worse, gripped with fear,
knowing hunger without appetite;
knowing a body
betrayed by breathless silence,
a heart pounding despite rest
and stilled limbs, a head pierced
with thundering throbs,
disconnected thoughts.
Fever flushed across my cheeks,
roared down my throat.

No one came with a cooling cloth.
No soup spooned between trembling lips.
Pillows unfluffed,
blankets pooled upon the floor.
The door closed against disease
for the plague stops here.

*Let them die
for they are old and ripe
for the harvest.
They've done their time.
They need to
At the back of the line.*

Jolayne Nelson-Harrington

Witness

In flooded fields, salsify gone to seed
floats, unworldly, on the surface.
Mist of pink tamarisk. Gleaming ibis, beaks
sheathed behind their wings. On the furthest

shore, a dead pelican rests, glowing
like opal. How can something so magnificent
perish? Everywhere I look: sloping
hills of brief balsamroot, bee eyes glistening

in fading flowers, there is a perfect
stillness, a dissolution of self.
In the milkweed, a dead honeybee I picked
like a ripe blueberry, delicate. I held

it in my cupped palm to drink its sweetness.
Speechless, dreamless beauty, I am your witness.

Shanan Ballam

Pandemic Paradoxes

The first week of March, the governor declared a state of emergency, due to coronavirus. No one called it COVID 19 at the time. The glaring paradoxes baffle me. Just a few months previously, we were told that everyone uses too much technology to communicate, senior citizens are impaired by social isolation, no one should endure sickness and death alone, trying to teach children at home is tantamount to insanity, traveling is a healthy and educational outlet, embracing people from foreign shores is American, shopping boosts the economy, and most of those magnificent kitchens are really just showcases.

he struggled for air
eyes remotely connected
what grief would we know

Now, we are encouraged to communicate via technology, senior citizens go into lockdown and quarantine, people really could die alone if there is not a camera for their relatives to watch, home-schooling enhances family connections, you can travel but there will be nothing to do once you arrive, allowing immigrants into the country is inviting death and disease, shopping is healthy only in huge, crowded box stores, and kitchen appliances really can be used for cooking and baking – well, if you can find the ingredients on a store shelf and not steal them from your neighbors' garages and basements

paradoxes rot
fouling my rattled old brain
like politicians

Silvia Mangen

To Form a More Perfect Union

Saturday my nephew promised
to teach me pottery skills.
He demonstrated what I could learn
watching clay yield to the push-pull
pressure of his potter's hands.

Soon time-weary his efforts to increase
and decrease were repeating the ingredients
of the clay. Seeking skill I did not stop
watching him.

A broadcast of another protest silenced us.
I knew I could not walk with the push-pull
of the crowd. I was watching the absence
of leaders to knead the process, and the
resistance to dialogue that through
collaboration could stand the heat of the kiln.

I still see cracks that can be mended
by learning the skills required, so
that we can experience a true democracy
that forms a more perfect union.

Kate Kirkham

Covid Nursery Rhymes

Jack Sprat was super fat.
His wife was super lean.
Now she is as fat as Jack
because of quarantine.

Mary had Covid 19
(She somehow got exposed).
And everywhere that Mary went
was boarded up and closed.

Diddle, Diddle, dumpling, my son John
Went to the store without a mask on;
Got flipped off, got piled on,
Diddle, Diddle, dumpling, my son John.

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill
But had to social distance
Despite Jack's wishes
There were no kisses,
Due to Jill's persistence

Hey Diddle, Diddle!
We're right in the middle,
Of panic, pandemic and gloom;
A little boy coughed
To clear his throat,
You won't see him anytime soon.

Shane Williams

The Plot of Two Sinister Cousins

Two dark, cloaked figures played cards by the fire.
Misery said, "Cousin, of this game, I tire."
Death responded, "Let us start a new one, perhaps."
"No, it's not just the game. Let us talk after our naps."

So Death, cloaked in black, took the couch.
Misery in red, crept down the hardwood floor.
And while they slept, Misery had a vivid dream.
It began with smoke carved out of steam.

Misery awoke and said, "I had a vision."
Death noted that it should be carried out with precision.
So they went to the kitchen and in a pot, created a virus.
"Surely, strong enough to early retire us."

Tough they knew it was a lie,
because Death and Misery's work will never die.

They took the new virus and sprinkled it in the East,
just when some of the World Leaders enjoyed a feast.
Then the cousins turned on the media and watched,
they knew that this plan would not be botched.

It began with canceled weddings, church, and cruises,
followed by schools closing and children with bruises.
"And yet we have a few more tasks,
to prevent smiles, we'll cover the world in masks."

After a while Death did not claim all that he had hoped,
so he scowled by the fire, grumpy and cloaked.
And remembered that his cousin was a jerk.
But Misery argued, "we've barely gotten to work."

"Watch, with the stores now closed,
crops will rot and farmers will be hosed,
and soon after that a great hunger."

Death argued I'm not getting any younger.
"I see how this is right for you, but not me.
I think I will go home and let you be,"
"Wait, we are just getting started,

a famine is coming, but Death still parted.
'Keep me posted, let me know how it goes,' Death said.
"I miss my home, and I miss my bed." And Misery was sad, to be left all alone,
so he slithered into Social Media and made it his home.

Once they were in lockdown,
people once friends made each other frown.
"There is no virus," some said,
"It was made up by the politician with the big head."

"We will surely die," the others would cry,
"The end is coming, and no time to prepare.
We will pass quietly without fanfare."

And then there was the resistance.
"The new vaccine will wipe this from existence.
We will share our supplies and our food,
we will help left each other's mood."

So some fought with faith,
that a day would come for sunshine on their bare face.
Misery was lonely, so he phoned Death.
Death listened and took a deep breath.

OK, we shall not give up on this plan of yours,
but what I really want is some good wars.
Misery persuaded him "while the virus works its magic,
let's keep the pot brewing with that which is tragic.
How about some extra racism, followed by riots and fires?"

That should root-out happiness like a pair of pliers.
"And what of the dead, asked death, will I now take more lives?"
"Certainly, promised Misery, this is where Death truly thrives."
So they watched their screens, each from their home.
Even though Misery hated being alone.

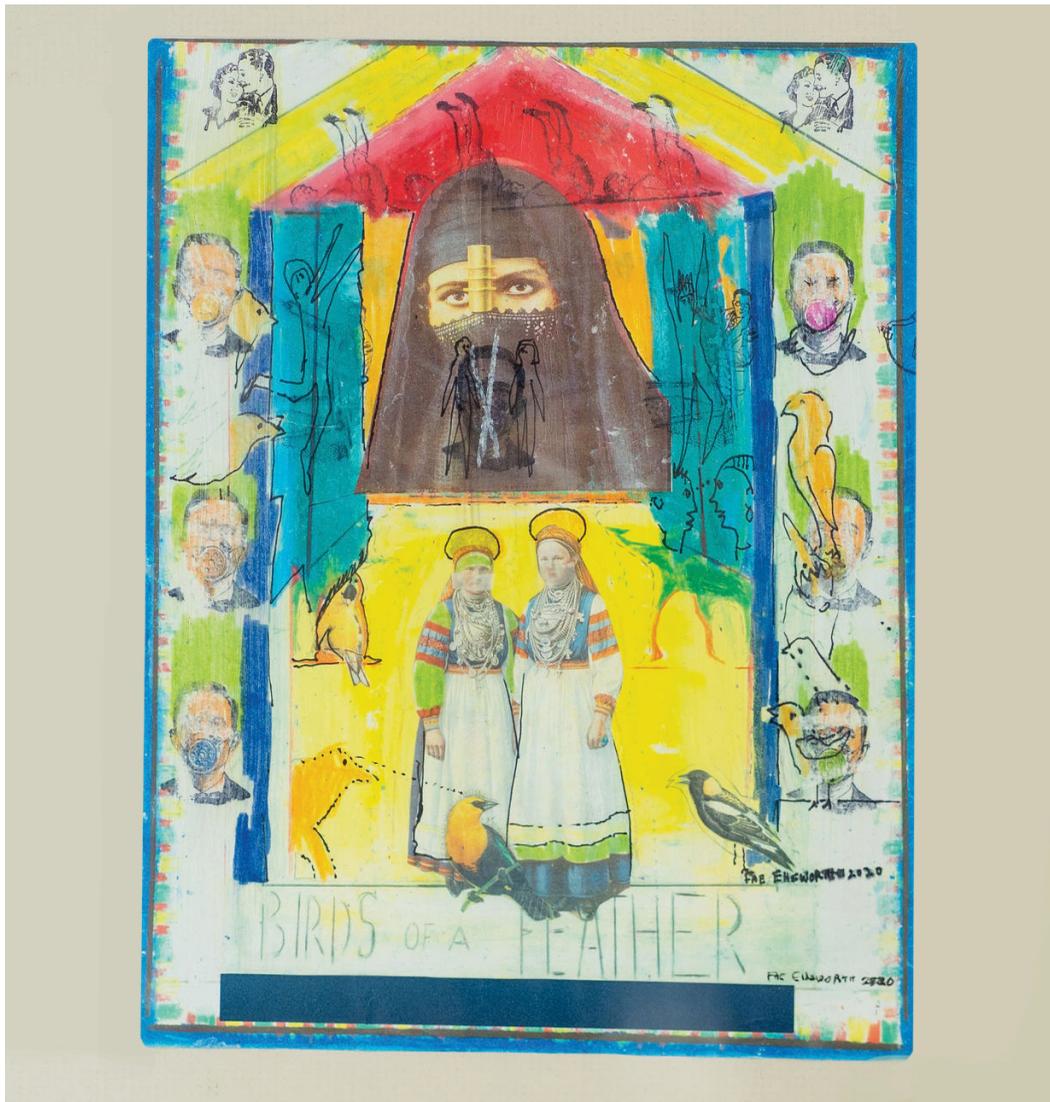
The final outcome is yet to be seen.
What will we contribute? Will there be a vaccine?
And if there were, would people be cured from being so mean?

Rachael Webb

Covid Revolution

It's done.
It's over.
It was all so easy.
So simple
The revolution began when the sheep were asleep.
It was all so innocent.
Face masks.
Everyone must wear a face mask.
For the health and safety of the Collective.
Across America stores suddenly became compliant.
Customers must wear a face mask to enter and shop.
Dissidents were not hauled away.
Were not locked up.
No Nazi concentration camps.
No gulags.
Instead, they became the latest headline:
 Man Who Refused To Wear Face Mask
 is latest Covid-29 Victim.
Individual rights, liberties and trust vanished.
Books were burned.
History rewritten.
Geriatrics and Native Americans died
In disproportionate numbers, no longer
From flu, pneumonia, or stroke,
Merely complications--contributing factors.
Adding to the total of the Covid infestation.
Within one year the revolution was complete
 --Without a shot being fired
 A new religion was born.
Orwell's dystopian vision was thirty-six years late.
It's done.
It's over.
It was all so easy.
So simple.

Michael Spears



Ellsworth, Fae, "Birds of a Feather"
Mixed Media

Before Sleep

When it is quiet and you can hear your breath
and listen for its answers,
even if you forget the words
on those rusty keys you carried on
a chain around your neck since birth.

Embrace them in the quiet dark.
Glance around at the unopened book
next to your tired head.
See the stars, the carless coins
gleaming on your dresser.

Tunnel into your memory cave.
Carve out with the small dull blade
All but the Yes.

Fae Ellsworth

Desert Grace

She gazes at red butte outside window.
A giant hand, she thinks, squeezed it sideways
Like a near empty toothpaste tube.
Placed it tidily back, listing to starboard
With diagonal wrinkles from the ordeal.

She sits in a deckchair, bare feet in desert sand,
Starlings arrive, that smart bird
That can imitate a car alarm, remember your face.
They sing, a congregation darkens sky,
Moves in patterns of amazement,
Morphs into glossy black cape.

She does not move.
A gold cord is swaddling her heart.
Life is bigger than we know.

Fae Ellsworth



**Bettilyon, Karen, "Caretaker Now"
Watercolors**

“View From a Window”

midnight waits
in the evening trees

silver and blue

distant lights

a city

glows with
growing pride

there are no
waking stars

a promise

a gentle breath
pushes

a hand somewhere
holding death

Papaya Becerra



Gentry, Carmen, "Good Bye Uncle Evelio"
Acrylic

CORONA

Back then,
 Meant cigar boxes.
Quick as a cat. I'd leap
 to a stool
at the drugstore soda fountain,
 smile, say
"Any empty boxes today?"

I'd hope
 for one made of wood
with that gold-s-splashy cardboard
 not a splashy cardboard
box, plastered with
 bright and curvy
smiling senoritas.

I remember
 cigars, hanging
from the lip
 of Grandma's brother
smoldering. They cancer-ed
 his nose,
his cheek, his life.

Mona Lee Clark

Paradise in Freefall

How long can humans
survive total oxytocin deprivation
if living alone?

Why does an Ogden
baker donate free bread; a loaf
to keep, a loaf to share?

Can we gather the jigsaw
shards of our splintered world
to heal body-n-soul?

When will dawn arrive
to arouse us from our omnipresent
viral nightmares?

We shuttered parties
in lockdown, can a waring world
negotiate a truce?

Can we preserve poised
sanity if uncertainty lurks
in perpetual pursuit?

Living in cloistered
isolation, can social animals
find true happiness?

Will our viral
paranoia persist once we emerge
from our safe caves?

Have we, Adams and Eves,
been banished from paradise,
forever in freefall?

Marie Tollstrup



**Clark, Sylvia T., "First Light 2020
—Time Space Energy"
Mixed Media**

Captive in COVID Orbit

Entropy crescendos
the day our spinning globe
calls for a timeout.

A covert crown-spiked
bouncer hijacks filigree dancing
lungs, then replicates.

We human animals,
driven to seek skin-to-skin contact,
socially distance instead.

Living in a lockdown,
we morph to sci-fi characters
in a dystopian novel.

Death abounds as nature
sports dappled nascent green
while roses blush in glory.

A stealthy virus forces
our mighty planet to its knees
to beg for deliverance.

Marie Tollstrup

Robust Rampage

Viral in a petri dish, exotic fruit of magenta
mirrors a lost sea urchin, leavens a ripe maturity
of venom to permeate random human species.

Without preference – gender, age, rich,
ugly, wise foolish – it will find us.

Fuzzy living tentacles, invisible to their prey,
breathe inside book covers, on surfaces, in nostrils.
A single requirement levels the victim playing field –

munchable lungs and bronchial tubes to quell
a viral starvation in suffocating death.

Panic empties grocery shelves, medical essentials, hoards
toilet paper, baffles industry and transportation, drains federal
reserves. Wall street plunges in an *on our knees* economy.

Face mask couture, Chanel, Gucci, become the rage.
Met Ball cancelled, public entities closed.

War of invisible weaponry shelters us in place, relinquishes
our souls to a foreign laboratory bat-germ payback; hungry,
disguised, unscrupulous, power-driven by greed and envy.

We wait our turn to swallow the medicine
in a prison of political pandemonium.

Sue Stevenson Leth



**Jackson, Kimberly, "Rolling Emotion"
Watercolor**

COVID HYSTERIA

A daily litter of pajamas,
J. Crew, Calvin Klein, Little Miss Kitty,
one for a ZOOM fashionista. No bling,
... bedroom slippers under every chair.

*"Due to Covid-19 our offices are
temporarily closed."*

Vitamins, yes. Shower, maybe. Dress, undecided.
Makeup, never. *What shall we empty today?* Washer,
dryer, hamper, dishwasher, dog dish, garbage cans?
...or the core of my very SOUL?

Teleconference appointment – mole
behind ear, Medicare bill \$545.00.

Alone with appliances, anchored, slippery, untrustworthy.
Stovetop burns butter, fridge freezes lettuce, sours milk.
Garbage disposal throws up leftovers.
... I keep them on the payroll.

Get dressed, clean the office, accept
ZOOM invitation to sister's funeral.

Follow vacuum pathways, close west shutters, turn down AC.
Shoes tied in double bows, clean arms of copper tubing bent
behind furnaces back. Porch lights dark, forgotten,
...how many quarantines to change a light globe?

Pink T-shirt, orange jeans, hair by Cuisinart.
New job – unemployment line.

Church on Hidden Valley Drive, fresh new brick and mortar, sits
useless, undedicated, white wheelchairs empty, doors chained,
draperies drawn.
... a chorus of politicians are singing to the choir.

You wait outside the hospital
where your husband might be dying.

Sue Stevenson Leth



Blakely, Glen, "Hope through Humor"
Paper

Boccaccio, on Plagues

1. Black Plague Quarantine, 1348

Sheltering in place in a villa north of Florence,
away from the dead rats and their fleas
spreading death, Boccaccio tells of ten friends
who find themselves in a cozy circumstance,
being there is a plague killing much of Europe.

They are not the poor who will die
by tens of thousands, but the well-heeled
with food and wine enough to see them through.
But faced with the boredom of simply surviving
and craving a distraction for a couple of weeks,
they need, he decides, to tell stories.

Here's his plan: Each night's appointed
King or queen chooses a theme – love,
maybe, sex surely. Anything goes.
Each sojourner relates a story,
ten stories a night, a hundred in all.
What better way to spend a plague.

2. Covid 19 Quarantine, 2020

Now fast-forward seven hundred fifty years
and forget the villa and your nine friends.
Covid's too sophisticated for dead rats
and hungry fleas. We can't see this virus
and can't trust each other. No plague parties here.
This is solitary confinement.

What would Boccaccio do? Having been
out of the technology loop for awhile,
he might suggest we shout stories
to our neighbors over the back fence.
Picture the look on his face when we say,
"We'll just share *Youtube* clips instead."

We'd explain that we had long ago lost
the knack of storytelling, that complicated
construction with plot or punchline.
We are more adept at tweeting, thinking
in tiny bursts. We're not sure how to breathe
life into characters of our own making.

Perhaps the part of our brain that houses
imagination has atrophied, been pushed out
by the piece that lets us remember passwords
or favorite lines from "Seinfeld."
When everything is at our fingertips,
where's the need to imagine anything?

Our storytellers are just a click away.
Netflix and Hulu are just lonelier
versions of narrator, and we, the passive
audience. But we feel the same fears
as those who hid in the Florentine hills
one plague being so much like another.

Bob Rippy

Living With the Virus

Eight weeks deep into our
stay-at-home edict we have
exhausted the obvious tricks
to keep ourselves sane
or at least occupied.

Bad movies on TV we would
never waste time on now seem
crucial to our well being. Puzzles,
stored in a closet for years,
become bright shiny objects.

When I was young, being bored
was my own damned fault,
I was told a character flaw,
a dearth of imagination. But now,
well into our lockdown,

I'm not so sure. Boredom
has gotten a bad rap. We
didn't know that enough of it
could morph into something
more, an elevated state.

of detachment, a new appreciation
of the mundane. We've changed
gears, and now watch the unfolding
of our lives through the lens
of a slow-motion camera.

My wife and I walk twice a day.
At first we varied the route
for a change of scenery. Now
we walk the same route and watch
how it varies in increments.

"Look how this cactus has opened
just since last night," she says,
and I say "the bees in the Mimosa
have lost their enthusiasm."
We keep track of things.

Bob Rippy

Lies of Life

Their words attached
burrowing like a tic

Mystery cords
of grace
rose like
a fist of malice

Shoulders twitched
eyes watered
goose bumps
feelings leaping
over a cliff.

Breathing strangled
her lungs
she gathered skies
with her eyes

spoke

I will take the
breath you left
behind,

unmasked.

Bonnie Anderson

The Covid Dance Party

My sister thinks I'm too careful.
My friend thinks I'm too reckless.
The lady at the store is triggered to abruptly shift left
and then right if we almost bump.
The one on a walk that looks like a space invader
and keeps looking back to make sure I'm keeping my 6 feet
between us.
The one that wears a mask when outside.
The one who will sit in the park with me but brings a ruler
to check the distance.
The person who wears a mask by herself in her car.
The nurse friend that invites me to dinner in her home - no mask.
The friend that doesn't allow me into her home.
The eyes peering above the mask. Friendly or fearful?
The friend that sprays down her groceries.
The neighbor lady who won't leave her house to get groceries.
The friend who exchanges fluids with multiple dates
but insists on wearing a mask in my car.
The friend that is concerned about being too close to me because
of my association with the previous friend. My head is spinning!
It's inconsistent, it's contradictory, it's frightening.
I need a drink. Oh, wait. I don't drink.

I would never have thought that within the same political beliefs
the variations on a theme would be so diverse.
The underbelly of what people hold sacred is revealed.
You compost? You don't compost? You only recycle?
You don't drive an electric car? You have a rain barrel?
You use a leaf blower? Are you eating a non-organic banana?
Tell me you don't choose plastic over paper?
I had a friend tear up with sadness when she saw a mixed bag on
a curb containing both plastic and aluminum.
Sigh.

Colleen Callahan

THE OGRE

Oh this ogre crept in
Like a cold deadly sin
And killed who it chose
Could be these, could be those

And they made us wear masks
For our day to day tasks
Stay six feet away
When we work, when we play

But alone is so tough
Isolation so rough
Just watching our tubes
Pouring Gin, stirring cubes

Now we hide out at home
Yeah, from Nashville to Nome
We wanna break out
Wanna scream, wanna shout

But we must keep our cool
Tho' this ogre is cruel
He'll soon fade away
Happy day, happy day

Denis Feehan

Isolation

Binging on *Netflix*
with pizza and beer,
I've been on this sofa
for what seems like a year.

Drinking's become
an Olympic event.
I'll get a gold medal
if this lasts until Lent.

Loafing is lasting
so long I could scream.
I gotta go somewhere
Scotty where is your beam?

Gotta get out man,
the mall or the moon.
Don't care which I visit
but its gotta be soon.

Walk into Walmart,
my mask hides my face,
like I am a bandit,
would the cops have a case?

Fill up my basket
with water and wine.
Drive home and unload it.
Tell myself I'll be fine.

That I'm not sure of
but one thing I know,
be binging on *Netflix*
for six months or so.

Denis Feehan

THE MYSTERY

what comes next
after the Grim Reaper
has his way with us

always lying in wait
we constantly fear him
and our sudden departure

from all we know and love
why must we leave earth
now in fear and despair

or is it the Great Redeemer
rescuing us from a troubled
world of pain and grieving

opening a door to a happier
holier place filled with loved ones
waiting to welcome us home.

Lin Vernon Floyd

WHY?

hope is elusive as a new butterfly
here for an instant then out of sight

longing for the peace and calmness
that nature brings to chaotic times

yearning for comforting within
as commotion builds everyday

can I cocoon myself and wait for
new beginnings to fly away in peace

Lin Vernon Floyd

Pandemic Contemplation

“What we allow the mark of our
suffering to become is in our own hands.”
(Lee Herrick’s collection “Scar and Flower”)

Oblivious to age, blind to fame or obscurity,
COVID-19 strikes the fit and frail among us
haphazardly. Sadly, strict social distancing
can’t rescue everyone.

Who lives or dies when or where may not depend
on comorbidities. Failure to procure enough PPE
creates complications for caregivers and victims
alike. Due to some intubated patients’ clogged lungs
and mucous-plugged lifelines, miraculous machines
can’t always resuscitate the fittest.

Unborn babies have succumbed in the womb,
while old folks die in nursing homes – or solo
in Intensive Care Units – surrounded by masked
strangers. Scientific terminology and political
rhetoric muddle mixed messages, with facts
and fiction juxtaposed in the headlines every day.

Meanwhile, life continues. Wakes and weddings,
farewells and homecomings, deaths and births are
bound to occur anyhow, whether or not confirmed
cases surge or viral controversies rage. Ultimately,
Herrick’s words ring true: whatever happens next
is entirely up to me and you.

Marney Hilton Zambrano

She's COVID-19 Free

The cattle are fed. She feels ready for bed
as the day has been brutal and long.
The darned Covid-19 has her surly and mean,
but she has to stay steady and strong.

As yet no one is sick. It would be a real trick
for the virus to travel out here.
Forty miles from town they are hard to track down,
only bad weather's found them this year.

Social distance is fine, but she's drawing the line
with her hubby who's dodging his work.
He has self-quarantined with his buddies convened
in the basement with beer and a smirk.

She's done laundry and cooked. Her day's been fully booked,
but there's still time to bristle and fume.
Taking matters in hand she has plotted and planned
for her own space away from her groom.

The essentials are packed and a note has been tacked
to explain that he's now on his own.
Now it's his turn to care for the ranch that they share.
She is tired and her patience has flown.

But before she takes leave, she has plans to retrieve
all the guns that he has in the house.
She collects the TP threading rolls with great glee
on the barrels of the guns of her spouse.

Like a soldier at work she has no time to lurk
as she loads up the plunder and loot.
The white tissue brigade marches out where it's laid
in the truck of the beer drinking coot.

The new diesel fires up. Is she sure of this? Yup!
Muddy tires roll to easier life.
When he leaves basement's bliss, which true love will he miss,
his new truck, guns, TP, or his wife?

Marleen Bussma



**Grow, Mary Jane, "Taken for Granted"
Oil**

COVID HAIKU

Twenty five cases
Of toilet paper for sale
Make us an offer

Gina Grissom

Pandemic Memories

What I remember is the ghost town
The way no one went out
No cars on the road
No people shopping
Ninety percent of the population
was scared, worried
The other ten
Was indifferent
Defiant with their false bravado
Flipping their finger at the television screen
Saying this is all fake
Fake News.

I remember going to the store
With my mom
For a few odds and ends
Walking in and seeing carts
Loaded to overflowing
People lined up
Fear in their eyes
The unbelieving ones
Stocking up on more than they needed
Bottled water, hand sanitizer and toilet paper –
As if a roll doesn't last longer than a day
As if you can't boil water –
They were really thinking of the money
If people ran out.

I remember watching the world shut down
Door after door to other places
Slamming shut
Airports closing,
Flights cancelled, banned
Hotels locking their doors
Only the necessities stayed open

And the Naysayers
Ranted and raved that they couldn't go out
Their rights were being taken away
They had to wear a mask
And it was just not fair.

I remember watching the body bags pile up
On the news
People singing to each other from balconies
And windows.
Learning how Zoom worked
Getting to know the people you lived with
Reconnecting with friends.

I remember
Slowing down
Watching the earth heal
The skies clear
The waters run clean
And it was a wakeup call
A chance to see what life could be like
If people cared.

I just don't think
Enough people heard it.

Gina Grissom



**Gerlach, Carol, "Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the safest of us all"
Multi Media**

BY THE NUMBERS

We are following the numbers
as they dominate the news.
The statistics in from China
are enough to give us clues
of the fate our country faces
in the days or weeks ahead
as they count the ones infected
and the ones already dead.
One report says twenty thousand
caught the virus in a day.
Someone else claims seven hundred
in the state have passed away.
We are staying home and trying
to stay well. It's not much fun,
but we know it will be worth it
if we help to save just one.

Grace Diane Jessen

PANDEMIC PLIGHT

There's a virus going 'round
that we're trying to avoid.
If we manage to stay well,
we will be overjoyed.

We are told to wash our hands
and to never touch our face.
We must stand six feet apart,
to be closer is disgrace.

Social distancing is key
in this topsy-turvy time.
We can't gather in a group
schools are closed, kids learn online.

Sports are cancelled, concerts, too,
restaurant dining now is gone.
Parks and zoos have closed their gates,
even funerals can't go on.

We are urged to stay at home,
read a book or phone a friend.
We will cheerfully comply
but we hope this soon will end!

Grace Diane Jessen

Humanity in Crisis

What will become of us after a pause as great as this?
Will we mend the gap created by such destruction?
Can we fill each crack with more empathy, more love,
seal the edges with compassion and understanding?
We're all in this together – after all.

Lindsay Stevenson Cutler

Songbirds

In times like these, truth is elusive,
a weapon to control the guileless and unsuspecting.
Is this our new normal?
So bleak and unrelenting?
Still we trudge on, carrying the weight
on tired shoulders
There is beauty to be found.
Whispering trees, harboring songbirds,
unaware of our strife and grief,
sing in spite of it all.

Lindsay Stevenson Cutler

A Quiet War

How precious mundane and tedious things turned out to be.
What was once a friendly embrace, becomes a quiet war.
Streets once buzzing with frenzy, lay empty.
Littered with fear.
We hide behind a façade made of cloth, masking trepidation.
While there is solidarity in this state of suffering,
the isolation
eats you alive.

Lindsay Stevenson Cutler

Back to School – 2020

Pack your bags!
Load the virtual bus!
We are All In for a ride!

Earth School in global session,
Semester-free,
Vacation not an option.

Grades obsolete, irrelevant,
In a new classroom unbounded
By walls and fences.

Lifelong learners,
No ages exempt,
Untold lessons unravelling.

Corona Virus Pandemic,
Social Justice Protests,
Masks, the new uniform.

May we take good notes
On the Zen Board of this life.

May we learn to Listen, to Love,
And share lunches,
And Live like dogs, color blind.

May we each day Commence
To salvage our hearts,
Our shared humanity.

Raven Chiong



Rawson, Miriam, "I Miss My Grandkids"
Oil

The Wisdom of Children

As the Corona virus spreads,
nothing worries children's heads.
I watch them from my window outside,
they have the courage not to hide.

They're just glad to be out of school,
fear is not a word that makes them fooled.
Out there at the basketball court,
no fear in these humans so short.

Too young to think they could get ill,
I watch them from my windowsill.
Seeing their bravery makes me smile,
they stay outside for a while.

I got a photo on my cell phone,
as I sat there all alone.
It was something a child wrote with chalk,
a rainbow and words, on the sidewalk.

"This too shall pass," in shiny colors,
no message could've been much fuller.
Tears rolled down my eyes, so blessed,
by some innocent kid who was the best.

If we could all have the heart of a child,
we wouldn't be the only one who smiled.
Whoever that kid was, he made my day,
the sunshine shown a brilliant ray.

Mark Hudson

Contemplating Existence

What leads to a better night's sleep,
Clean sheets or clean pajamas.
Perhaps clean is the operative word.
We live in a world that begs for clean hands,
even though I was always told you won't amount to much
unless your hands are dirty.
But so often it is the mind that runs amuck
and I get stuck between clean and pure.
Pure is probably the 'gold standard.'
but gold is never quite pure.
So clean sheets are never entirely clean,
and even brand new pajamas have to be washed,
nothing is entirely clean.
Sleep on that.

O. William Asplund

Pandemic

Avoiding death by non-living:
is that really a new theme?
Or just a very old one
come back around the corners of time?

It's clear: no one is an expert on this.
Like everything else *en masse*,
we are all making up
answers as we go along.

Looking for solutions
in deep medicine junk drawers
is a spiral within a spiral
that flips direction with each seeker.

Even though God alone
knows outcomes from beginnings,
on this issue, he is keeping
the end to himself.

Anyway, who is really listening.
The day of the Dead
has been canceled
for the Year of the Dead.

Picking up the pieces
is just that:
too many bodies buried sadly
at unattended graveside funerals.

Never, if one thinks about it,
has there been a better time
to be a hermit, or a mountain man,
or a spinster in a big old house.

Frank M. DeCaria



**Blakely, Glen, "Covid 19 'WHO'"
Paper**

Strangers in Masks

An illness like weight falls
upon the land—spreads
in unmasked voices
from self-proclaimed experts.

Flies drop like humans;
and medicine has
evolved into a perilous career,
riskier than going off to war.

And everyone knows someone
who knows someone else
who knows someone
grieving in the darkness.

Keeping up with the Joneses
is now managed via cell phones
and seventy-inch televisions
that export the news.

Everywhere every day,
myriad strangers in facemasks avoid
other strangers in facemasks,
understanding helplessness.

Fluttering in the wind
are the lingering images of graves
being dug in every country
for the unlucky ones.

Frank M. DeCaria

Painting in a Cave

HGTV sends weekly emails showing 38 what's-trending ideas to cover bare walls. Not much different than Lascaux, jonesing to make our mark.

If not make it, buy it. Textile: two needlepoint parrots in oval frames, hand-stitched by grandma. Walk out to the fire pit. Pick up

a piece of charcoal. Mark making—Kilroy was here—that speaks to authenticity. Monotype Diptych: The Geology of Language,

ink on paper, cream scribbles surface through the black. Indecipherable. People grow restless. Shelter in Place mandates prevent in vain the spread

of something new. *We just had to get out of the cave.* Is there something wrong with your cave? Not happy staying in, going out, deadly.

Photos: black-and-white silver gelatin on paper, taken in grad school, the abandoned flour mill when you tried to be a photographer. There's

no place like cave. There's no place like cave. No place... if only ruby slippers... Don't be dramatic, all we really want is a fresh baked chocolate chip cookie.

Shelter. Place. Warmth. Food. Sex. Marks. What could the tally be? It could be Feng Shui, it's probably Genius Loci.

Spirit of Place. Who dances across shadow walls in candlelight? Oil on raw linen: Two Naked Boys Dancing, painted by a bisexual artist.

To see *Tous les Matins du Monde*, the tragic film, somber viola da gamba scored throughout, but not every sunrise. Enjoy what can

be seen from the kitchen window while eating oatmeal with blueberries. Watercolor on paper: Rainbow Grid, graphed like an equation, gift from a precious lover, painted when he was in

junior-high. A pot of black beans boils on the stove. Biscuits bake in the oven. Mom's crocheted afghan drapes across the couch.

Dad's high-school wood-shop lamp lights the table. Paper and twigs: Family Tree, leaves twitch in the slightest stir, branch

how we came to be born in this desert valley of poplar trees, temples, irrigation ditches, though we descend from fishermen in the fjords. Home –

the golden egg—belongs only to you, to everyone. Solitude. Respite. Protection. Tapestry: white ink on green cloth, a mass-produced Dalai Lama

from a new age reminds: Be kind. Whisper to every sun that has ever burned and will ever burn for all brothers and sisters to flourish in caves of dancing shadow.

Acrylic on black velvet: dickered for around the fountain in Cuzco town square, Machu Picchu, from the band of boys pretending to be artists.

Shawn Dallas Stradley

Balance

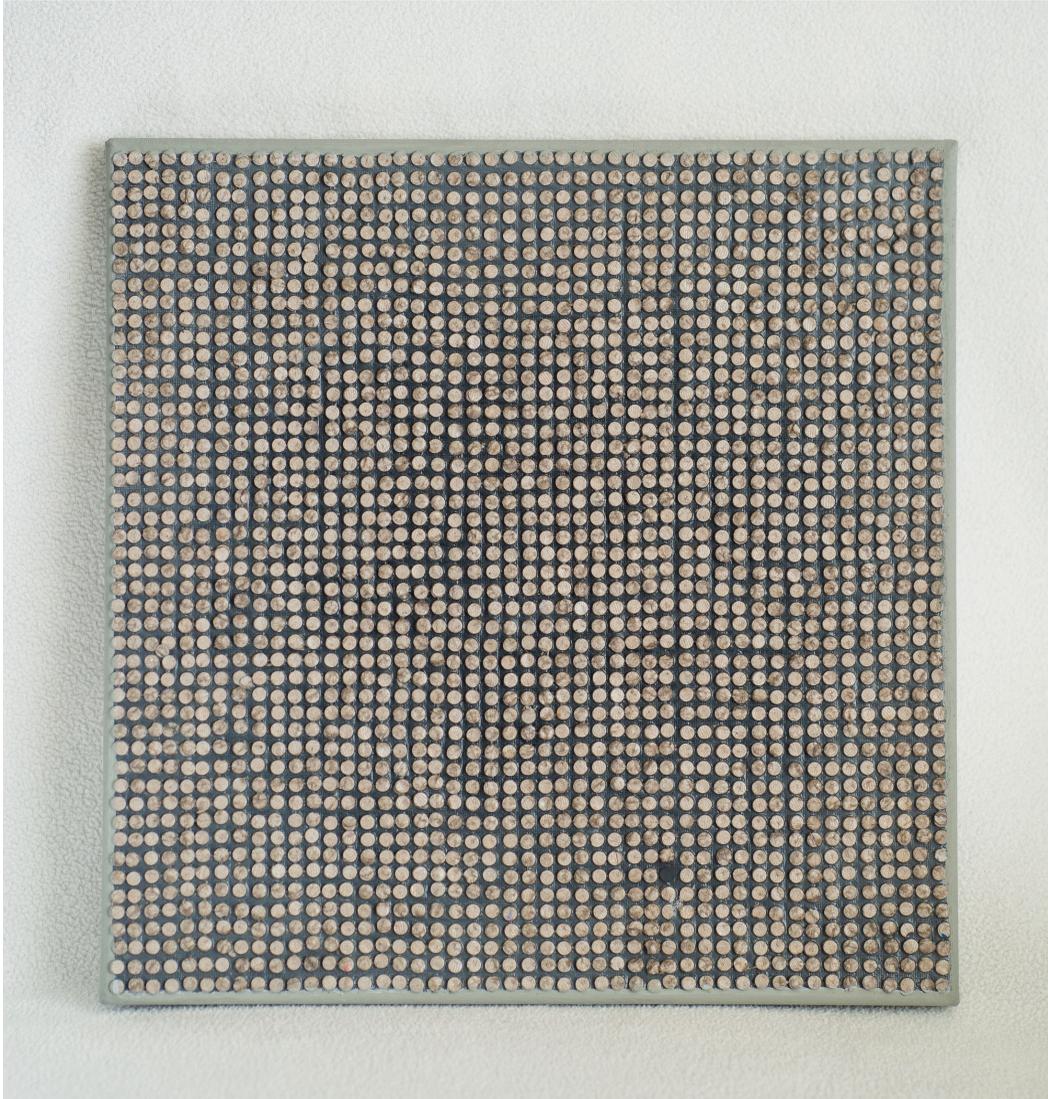
News on the radio is
Sad and foreboding.
In times of trouble
The sweet routines of life can make the difference.

After coffee and morning chores
There is time for a short walk
And a little writing .
Garden harvest time brings
Boxes of ripening tomatoes
Brown bags and trays of drying bean pods
Kale, chard and beet greens dormant in the freezer.
Last of the zinnias,
Buttons of scarlet, coral, white and gold
Fill cups and glasses on the kitchen table.

Radio tells of the unseen viral stalker,
Political struggles and threats,
My head not in the sand,
But in the stars and attuned to the weather,
I listen to the news, to the birds, to the wind.

Simple joys and the goodness of work
On one arm of the scale.
The incomprehensible and inscrutable
On the other.

Debra Csenge



**Gillespie, Pattie, "The Relationship of Time in Isolation"
Mixed Media**

Strangest of Times

My mother liked to talk
About the Depression.
How it was the best of times and
How it was the worst of times.
How everyone stuck together.
How they helped each other.
How they had fun
Even though they had almost nothing.

Not it is the strangest of times.
We live in bunkers
With our books and our projects,
Cleaning and distancing
Feeling moments of panic
As we contemplate the Pandemic.
People pulling together,
Sharing news and necessities.
Following the protocols of safety,
Taking care of each other.

These were the early days
Of the Pandemic.
In later days
The seeds of division were sown.
But that's another poem.

We are curious animals
Who care for each other in a crisis.
I, for one, will be thinking on
These things for a long time.
I for one, and among many,
May just never be the same again.

Debra Csenge

COVID

Is two cats warring
on a rug—
one isolating the other
longing—
they mix now, one
black, another grey
all claw and howl
tearing at each other
looking for soft
underbelly, land
that death blow,
disemboweling rake
but all in fun
a mock battle that
with one call to dinner
is forgotten and we
cats trot to bury our
heads whisker deep
in forgetfulness

Isaac Timm

I want to order room service

& I want to go jogging down the bicycle lane on the street
near my house / gently glide down its slope away from
Mount Timpanogos avoid the large fallen pods from locust
trees & the sadness of a clump of decomposed bird's feathers
pressed flat by a pickup truck tire / the sadness of statistics
of pandemics of children caged of women missing of men
lying where they ought not to lie & then turn one-hundred-
eighty degrees at the stop sign by the church back toward
the mountain filling the sky blocking the horizon / where
other sadness must exist between me & earth's edge where it
too turns / curves into ocean & dissolves into space / the sun
wrapping it in a fiery blanket of soon-to-be ash & think if
only the climb toward home was more slight until I reach my
cul-de-sac, slow / to a walk to reach my doorstep & stretch
off the intensity / taste the salt of my upper lip / feel the
trickle from beneath my breast / step inside into the shower
stall / rinse perspiration & pollen & pollution from my hair /
finish just in time for that loud knock at the door.

Trish Hopkinson

Pandemic Poker

holed-up
every night

it's 60-watts of incandescence
a pull-chain bulb over the kitchen table
you & your sweetie playing

crazy 8's & 5-card stud

you're a bar fight
in a mean-street nightclub

without the fight
without the bar

the room smoky
with blue-streak swearing

all the best words
your god forbade you to say

because the stakes matter

except they don't

so when you're done
tallying the score
naming the champ

you both fall asleep to late-night TV
letting Perry Mason work out the details.

Lisa Gustavson

COVID AND THE COLD

The cold, cold howling wind, bitterly from the north,
Shook the windows and shrieked in anger,
Safe, secure in my brick-oven kitchen, with my steamy rich and meaty soup,
yet suppressed a shiver.

Outside was Covid and cold and anger.

I was somehow gladdened by this midwinter storm.

There is nothing yet as deeply satisfying as contrast.

Warm comfort, decision-less comfort,

to stinging snow pellets driven into a stranded soul.

Alone, away from both weather and the virus,

I shivered and felt secure in my home.

Winds now coming from the dreaded northeast,

I knew the snow was only beginning to blow and mound.

Down in the village, shops would soon be closing early,

There was no one shopping now, nothing worth buying

Except...

I swore I wouldn't go out for gold,

Not in the snow and the ice and the cold.

A cigarette, a cigarette! I realized as I spoke.

There wasn't a single cigarette in the entire house to smoke!

Forget about it?

No, I went out.

Greg De Luca

Clinically Effective RX for SARS-CoV2 Relief (But Not Necessarily CDC-approved)

Four weeks after my wife passed
the pandemic hit.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2,
Covid-19
for short.

Overnight my mourning became a solo
enterprise.

No more casseroles
from the Sisterhood.

No more hugs
from friends.

No more in-person
“Sorry for your loss.”

At least the mask I now
am required to wear,
covers my quivering chin
every time I have a Luella moment---
my angel of forty-seven years,
red hair the color of sunset on the Pacific.

The only telltale sign of grief
is leaky eyes.

I could blame a faulty bilateral
blepharoplasty to restore my peripheral vision,
but that would be unfair.

I had dry eyes for a spell after having my lids lifted but
never suffered from epiphora during recovery.

It's hard to see when your
eyes are filled with unexpected tears.

Sometimes I pull over while driving when
that song comes up
on my playlist.

You know *that* song---
the one in the Before Time
when you could dance and
hold someone close without
worrying about infecting your
loved one---the time
before social distancing sterilized
human
touch.

In mid-March, one week after "novel coronavirus"
became a household phrase,
they shuttered the
Senior Center and
disbanded the
Bereavement
Support
Group.

No worries.
There was Zoom Grief Group---
Hollywood Square-style video conferencing on steroids
where we were exposed to
the "Wheel of Emotion" and
the "Circle of Gentleness" and
"Checking-in."

Connecting to the app was a Herculean hurdle
requiring misadventures in geekdom, but
eventually the technologically challenged
became Zoom Masters,
even the ones who'd
forget their false teeth
before signing on.

Thirty minutes into the first online session,
once all were finally logged in,
video feeds live,
audio unmuted,
the Bereavement Chaplain said:

“On a scale of 1 to 10, how are you feeling?”
“About Covid?” I asked.
“About your loss?” she answered.

“So, just to clarify,” I said, “for this *Feelings from Loss Scale*
can I assume 1 is can’t-get-out-of-bed and
10 would be rapture-with-ascension-imminent?”

“Something like that.” The Chaplain nods then advises:
“If you can *express*
your emotions, you can *address*
your emotions.”

“Clever,” I mumble.

Zoom is omniaudient, hearing everything,
amplifying my voice for the other online grievants.
There is a muffle of widow and widower titters.

The Chaplain, omniscognizant, smiles with empathy. She’s
definitely going to pandemic heaven and
I’m thinking I should give her a five-star
rating on Yelp
when the group session ends.

“I’m feeling a...-1,” I say.

Blank looks on every panel in the Zoom screen.

“Minus-one-pillow-over-the-head depressed and
that’s only for Covid,” I clarify. “I have two
simultaneous feelings, the second being about
my loss...for which I feel...0.”

No one says anything---
I still have the Zoom mic---
so, I offer the following:
“I’m numb as in no ‘numb’er, zero being
the space between living hell and spirit
prison.”

One by one, the group members' mouths
flatten into tight lips.
Online dialogue ceases.

"Thank you," the Chaplain says. "In the Gentleness Circle
we never judge.
Is anyone else ready to check-in with us today?"

I listen to the others share, grateful
my loss
is not nearly as raw
as the woman whose partner dropped
dead last week.

Empathy tears dribble down my cheeks.

My mind wanders to
a FaceTime exchange yesterday with my
neighbor:
"Word has it," she said, "for introverts, self-
quarantine is a blessing. Oodles of time to
recharge.
But..." she cautioned, "isolation can lead to
permanent psychic damage. At least that's
what the science says."

(In 2020, "science" is privileged discourse,
authoritative beyond question.)

"You know," my neighbor confided, "Brother
Gregarious is losing it."
She spins her index finger,
never touches her temple,
in that universal sign
for 'gone loco.'

"This pandemic thing," she laments.
"He no longer smiles,
never jokes,
lives without song."

Staying safe takes on new meaning.
What if I...
lose it...
during Zoom Grief?

I bow my head to pray,
then remember some free advice about
grieving,
proffered at my wife's funeral:
"The only way out is through."

Well, I think, the only way for extroverts
to survive Covid is to develop
a Multiple Personality Disorder---
a family of the mind to
keep you company.

Am I an extrovert or an introvert?

Merely blessed
with M.P.D. kinfolk as imaginary
companions
or

Dearly blessed
with self-isolation sufficient to
recover from the energy-sap of
"peopling?"

That's when I come up with a simple Rx for Covid-compounded grief:

Anger Displacement.

Step One: Commission a creative type
to make a piñata in the
shape of the Covid-19 virus---
silver-gray globe punctured with red
outward-facing cone florets.

*I ask my gifted granddaughter to be my
piñata maker.*

Step Two: Fill said piñata with
appropriate prizes---

hand sanitizer, Lysol wipes, and
individually wrapped candies.

Forget Pile of Poo Plushies---

Though bathroom-humor-funny and quite possibly an appropriate booby-prize for how this year has gone, do not stoop to make the point. Poomojis are so 2019 and would only distract from the severity of the New Normal.

My daughter living in Covid-ridden SoCal orders the prizes---Amazon Prime, same-day delivery.

Step Three: String the piñata over a crossbeam. Line up participants, social distancing, of course, and hand them a bat, hand-lettered to read:

ANGER DISPLACEMENT.

Again, my granddaughter comes through with a "custom bat"--- bone-ash gray with dripping red letters, ALL CAPS.

Step Four: Use a disposable surgical face mask as a blindfold.

It really works! Once I move the mask up from my granddaughter's nose to just above her eyes only, she truly can't see.

Step Five: (and this is critical): Disorient the participant by

Yeah, like the whole last six months hasn't been disorienting enough...

spinning them three times.
Use disposable medical exam gloves, of course. No skin-on-skin transfer.

And then let them

W H A C K !

Phase 1 Clinical Trial Results?

Promising!

At least for the non-random sample
in the treatment safety study
conducted in my backyard.
Efficacy rate: 100%
Fatalities: None

Cathartic!!

With each swing, rage transfer (from bat
to coronavirus emblem) reduces desire to
doomscroll the Web.

Fast-acting!!!

Bite-sized chocolate (milk or dark) tests positive
for curing epidemic pain,
achieving miracle drug status.

There you have it:

Paper-mâché Covid-19 piñatas and

Anger Displacement bats.

Grief relief in pandemic times.

Christopher G. Jones

“I Don’t Know,” Said the Crow

Tell me what is next?
Ahhh, future is perplexed.

Must I be alone?
The answer is foreknown.

Why is pain so slow?
I don’t know. I don’t know.

Is it at my door?
We are all in this war.

Need I wear a mask? My friend, you need not ask.
But we look alike?

Yes, that is only right.
Am I the next to go? I don’t know. I don’t know.

Kathy Cieslewicz



Cieslewicz, Kathy, "I Don't Know, Said the Crow"
Oil

Pandemonium

The flowers are still blooming
The lilac and rose;
A fabulous fragrance
A feast for my nose.

The sun is still shining
Like a blessing from above;
Melting my heartless heart
With a flood of pure love.

The grass is still growing
It's a blanket of green;
Blades reaching to sky
With their eager sheen.

The mountains are still standing
Eternally proud;
Towering above me
Making a statement that's loud.

The birds are still singing
A magnificent song;
The pandemic will end
Pray it won't be too long.

Michael J. Kruse



Northcott, Ginny, "Sketching From Home"
iPad/stylus

He asked for help and they sent him away

In April 2020, Gary Fowler, a 56 year old Black man with many Covid-19 symptoms, was turned away from three Detroit hospitals and sent home. At one hospital, a White woman with a Grub Hub tummy ache was admitted and helped, instead of Gary's wife. She also had Covid symptoms and was sent home. Gary was never admitted, tested or treated. Days later, he died at his home.

It happened in Detroit on a spring day;
He asked for help and they sent him away.

The pain he felt was gruesome and scary;
A Black dad in Detroit, his name was Gary.

Three hospitals wouldn't see him that day;
He asked for help; they sent him away.

For the poor and Blacks, Covid is unfair;
He suffered at home in his rocking chair.

With a cough and fever on that spring day;
He asked for help and they sent him away.

His son said, "Pop won't wake and can't get air!"
This is unacceptable and just not fair.

If he were White, wouldn't turn out this way;
He asked for help and they sent him away.

Three hospitals said "No!" so he died instead.
Too many Black Covids in Motown are dead.

How many more people will die this way?
They'll ask for help and will be sent away.

Three hospitals wouldn't see him that day;
He asked for help and they sent him away.

Michael J. Kruse

COVID 19

I knew the first time I looked at the picture of Covid Virus 19 that I had seen a foreign agent as deadly, a long time ago. Looking at the pictures of the virus I saw a sea mine, an unseen underwater explosive agent used to sink ships in WW II. Underwater mines were built to kill by remaining undetectable until a ship or a passerby barely touched the spikes covering the mine, causing a catastrophic explosion. The round cell has spikes too, red ones, that are like swords of S-proteins. The spikes also create the effect of a halo or corona around the virus. This is what the Covid virus-mine uses to obtain attachment to the human cell. The red spikes explode causing the membrane coatings to fuse with other nearby vessels. Then the genes, the soldiers of the coronavirus enter the human cell copying itself into nothing less than a formidable army. Explosion of the mine triggers a wave of heat an overnight invasion by the viral army raises the body temperature to three digits. The mine detonation releases enough pressure to rupture a vessel's wall. The virus discharges toxins instigating unbearable joint and muscle pain. The strike is to sink the invading ship. The pathological assault is to destroy the lung tissue. The vessel sinks to the bottom of the sea. The patient dies.

Mary Ann Mejdrich



Williams, LuAnn, "Caution - COVID 19"
Oil

Covid Coping

Make sure you test positive for faith.
Keep your distance from doubt.
Isolate yourself from fear.
Trust in God through it all.

Anonymous

Progress to date. . .

Children have one on one time with parents, sometimes.
Sanitizing becomes an art form.
Items to sustain life become more important.
Learning to solve problems without violence “a work in progress.”
Gratitude over-flowing for health care, fire and safety angels.
Exercising helps mental and physical wellbeing.
Religious beliefs, even for those who had none, intensifies.

Leah Zollinger

A Covid-19 Conundrum

To mask or not to mask, that is the conundrum.
It is wiser to cover both mouth and nose
and suffer restricted breathing and fogged lenses,
only to hear some fool say, “Oh, you’re wearing a mask?”

Or to suffer the eye darts and snide remarks
from the masked when I am unmasked?
The “science” is confused and lost,
therefore, we must dream and consult the “bones.”

“To sleep, perchance to dream.”
Alack, Alas! The “bones” tell us nothing.
A solution! A solution! My sanity for a solution!
Ah, I know! I shall sequester in quarantine and have
what I need delivered by Smith’s.

Eric Read

We've Lost Our Senses With Covid-19

'Common sense is not common to everyone' – Anonymous

One symptom of the active virus is losing the sense of smell.

No odors, good or bad.

No fragrance, waft, perfume.

Smell is so connected with taste.

Smell will tell you if something is rancid or good before you taste it.

Taste will tell you if the spices are right: too much salt? Not enough herbs?

Another casualty of our senses is sight.

We can't see the smiles of others through their masks

Of course, masks muffle the speech for hearing.

I miss touch the most.

How do you do these things and still social distance?

You cannot hug or kiss a family member or loved one,

Or give a hearty handshake at an introduction,

a good pat on the back to someone who deserves it.

Get a massage, haircut, dental work, eat together, clink a glass, share a toast.

Hug a friend that mourns, wipe a tear, hold a hand, listen to a heartbeat.

Have a quiet intimate conversation, share a whisper in the ear.

Touch another with your heart.

Marilyn Marshall



Harlin, Judith, "You Count"
Colored Pencil

Lots of Tears

There are lots of tears with this COVID-19 virus
Missing smiles and hugs
Isolation, whether self-imposed or for others.

Stories of our heroes:
Front line workers holding the hand of our loved one so they won't die alone;
as we can only watch.

Funeral directors overwhelmed with bodies;
reaching out to families for care
and dignity of their dead.

Delivery people and cashiers, maintaining food supplies,
Farmers growing and providing for markets.
All the sacrifices of time and health risk for strangers.

Enough to make you cry.

People give their pets extra hugs to supplement the missing contact. Dogs are walked
more to get owners outdoors to enjoy fresh air. The skies are brighter, the water
clearer.

We are learning priorities: Family-love-hugs and kisses.

We are using social media the way it was meant to be;
Increase communication, not mute it.

Parents are called more by their children,
just to see how they are doing,
so they won't be lonely and know they care.

When this is over and we can smile and shake the hands again.

When we can hug and socialize with each other again.

There will be lots of tears.

Marilyn Marshall

Monuments

History won't last forever. Unfortunately.
What is left is not for grabs; it is an indicator
how we may be, maybe.
Solid reminders, poised and promised of better
days ahead, neither listen nor speak intuitively.

Only impressions of someone or something before.
Something or someone we would implore
to be something or someone like that or more.
Maybe more than what is imagined, evermore.

Statues commissioned to be here, or rather there;
from foregoing achievements they carried in their time.
To be reminders and inspiration clandestine.
What has been, what is, and what may be, maybe.
More than what is imagined, evermore.

Gracious artists labored deep concealing,
their own courage's ambitions as soul embedded
layer for layer akin. Good conscience runs deep and wide
to carry the fountain head in type and foe always
on and on in perpetuity.

Never lessened beyond life, everywhere it has been.
To be plain and simply oceans and oceans
pre-empted and premier notions.

Raymond D. Christensen



Scott, Mel "Global Peril"
Egg Tempura

Chronicles of the Heart

Clearing any hurdle approached in stride
before a hand can reach or touch an eye.
More image, canvassed portrayals, than time;
reaching beyond bounds great minds have cherished.
All in perfect moments, all alone.
Voicing whole cantatas on a pin-head,
never failing, never falling metronomes
only understood heart to heart; heart to heart.
Boom-pa, boom-pa, boom-pa, boom....
making headway, making room;
filling crystal clear creations.

From safe within soft chronicles of the heart
into less certain arenas' renown for compromise.
Interpersonal conversations allow lucid words;
once ligatured, twice bound beyond response.
Now and again excited, embarrassed.

Strings severed completely at two ends.
Never failing, never failing metronomes
only understood heart to heart, heart to heart.
Boom-pa, boom-pa, boom-pa boom...
Making headway, making room,
filing crystal clear creations.

Defined horizons as they touch the sky
and are escaping the clutch of our immortality.
More image, beyond bounds great minds have
cherished.

Into lighted chambers, writs of past and afore.
Noising clean and directed other worlds
visible, visible as our own sands of time, after time.
Boom-pa, boom-pa, boom-pa, boom...
Personal colorful, instinctive Banda loom;
Receiver and provider, boom-pa boom...

Raymond D. Christensen

The 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic

There came a tragic time of viscous bugs,
a time when virus plague prevented hugs,
a time when humans cleaned all germs from rugs
and walls, electric switches, wires and plugs.

A warming hug became a space of feet
we measured during times when men would meet.
No groups of more than ten could mass to greet.
No meals were shared to pass the bread and meat.

Because no vaccine known could protect life,
because no pill developed stifled strife,
because no cure defended spreading rife
of illness, populations felt the knife.

Each day we watched as numbers rose and rose.
We donned a mask to cover mouth and nose.
We worked at home without our suits and hose,
declaring sweats our proper business clothes.

Our children stayed at home to learn when schools
were closed to follow shelter safety rules.
Our puzzled scientists studied molecules
and plasma like a team of plowing mules.

Our doctors and nurses worked hard and long
to save the lives of sick that came in throngs.
Their patients filled the beds where ill belong,
then packed in ships and tents to heal the strong.

The stay in place approach to quarantine
released more moans when money grew too lean.
Then jobs dissolved from normal business scene.
This virus changed our lives from what had been.

Sara Gipson

This I Do Not Love

What does it mean, New Normal?

I know New, I love New. . .

New shoes, new clothes, new friends

This I Do Not Love!

I know Normal, I love Normal

Cocooned in my comfort zone

That's Normal

This I Do Not Love

What does it mean,

Stay home,

Shelter in Place

Self Quarantine

Isolation

This I Do Not Love

No Movies or Concerts

No Football games

No Church – No Hugs

This I Do Not Love

I see you, my Friend, at the grocery store

Why are you standing so far away

I can't hear you

I can't read your lips

I can't see your smile

This I Do not Love

I see your eyes, my friend. They look like mine.

I feel fear

I feel sadness

I feel loneliness, Do You?

This I Do Not Love

People are getting really sick, my Friend. Are you well?

Hospitals are filling up

Doctors and Nurses are so tired

Old people are dying. I'm old. You are old.

Are we going to Die?

This I Do Not Love

Kathleen McGraw

Staying Sane

Let's go for a walk. What a beautiful day!
Good Morning, hummed the Bee as he buzzed away.
Days spent alone need not be gloomy
There is much to be done so I won't be lonely.

Bright colored fabric makes sewing a charm
"Days For Girls" gives meaning to time spent alone
Girls stay at school, not sadly at home.
Confident smiles replace their frowns forlorn.

Then there is time for another task, too
Let's make a bright colored face mask for you
While we are at it let's see what we can do
To make someone happy and do something new.

A phone call helps to drive away blues
It's a great way to visit and you don't need shoes
Hello, dear friend,. How are you feeling today
Do your dogs keep you happy? Do they want you to play?

Time to relax, take a short nap, have a quick snack, too
I take out my Kindle and give it a tap
Play a few word games, play Sudoku, too
Keeps your mind sharp drives away the blues.

Oh, I almost forgot, time for my Zoom class. Learning a lot.
The Grain is incredible, Native American History so sad
Mark Twain is a character, just like Tom and Huck
And my writing is improving, I'm having good luck.

I'm reading more books on my Kindle, my sister is too
Then we chat on the phone about what we have read
Choose a new title and move on ahead.

I listen to music, color pencil drawing is so calm
Bake up some cookies without any qualms
Order groceries online, drive by the store
Go to bed early, and get up to some more.

Kathleen McGraw

Wail Whimper Whine

Before the internet,
telephone and telegraph,
before Pony Express
there was nothing to do,
more or less, but suppress fears
and wait and trust
that those who left the nest
had done what was best
as they headed to the wild
and untamed West.

Today with internet
and phone, all fine
I wail, whimper and whine
because I must decline to visit
those I long to see face-to-face
who live in such a far-off place.

Best stay home this holiday, I say,
too risky, too dangerous, a cost to pay,
plus grandma is super old and somewhat frail
hold fast your silent, pent-up wail.
Maybe next year, my dear,
our desperate fears will disappear
this plague we'll beat
and we will meet and greet
with hugs and kisses sweet,
but for now, *Ciao*.

Marilyn Richardson

No Place to Run

Mid-October, Twenty-twenty,
and the greyest of mornings
keeps me inside. The patter and drizzle
that revives flowers makes my reflections
misty and full. Already sequestered
from the world-wide pandemic ---
 one more of Earth's revolutions
 to fight off its own plague of mankind.
If there were a *safe place*, it would be
in a deep forest,
or a wild meadow
a turbulent sea cliff
perhaps an isolated island
or at the edge of a glacier.

But how would I survive
without all the machinations
fashioned on our frantic way
to our own obliteration?

Kollette Montague

Quietude

The light today is grey
and smooth, as though God's hand
is covering the sun.
It's cold like Christmas past,

and smooth, as though God's hand
forgot to turn the earth.
This cold, like Christmas past,
where shadowed hope was slim.

Forgetting to turn, the earth
holds breathless, still and calm
where shadowed hope is slim.
Somewhere there must be light,

held breathless, still and calm,
to give poor mortals hope.
Somewhere there must be light,
and so we wait and watch.

Reprieve – poor mortals hope –
uncovering of the sun.
And so we wait and watch,
but light today is grey.

Kolette Montague

After the Neighbors Re-Landscape

I open the blinds in the morning dark,
look out on the southwest sky where two
giant pines and a spruce used to block
my view of the moon. They're gone,
felled for a hobby observatory,
the tracking of planets by telescope,
time-lapsed photography via cellphone,
frame after frame patched together
to make art from nebula seen through
the stars of far constellations
without the obstruction of trees.

They were old, precarious,
tilted by winds of climate change,
each storm a new threat to our lives
in this town where pioneers
planted their favorites, the kinds of trees
that don't belong, their shallow roots,
their weakened state from beetle-boring,
casting off pollen and cones, dying
even as our neighbors took them down,
a pandemic project held-off until fall,
when summer birds had left their nests
in the boughs and flown south.

Standing at my window bathed
in morning moon, I imagine
sun in winter, no more ice dams
on the path to the garden, perennials
thriving early in spring, and in fall
the bright colors of asters and zinneas.
Full and brilliant through the naked
boughs of my thundercloud plum,
the moon shines like a work of art,
a view I'll keep for years to come
now the dark trees are down. It's a trade
we made with our neighbors,
the bird-filled shade for a sky of stars.

Star Coulbrooke



Lopez, Mari, "The Healing Garden"
Acrylic/gold

If I Could Choose

the hour,
the hallowed spot
to draw my final breath
it would be here within this grove
as sleepy sun peeks morning to the earth.

If I could choose the cot
on which to lie
for that desolate retreat
it would be upon this golden spread
of fallen aspen leaves.

If I could choose a shroud
to cover and
encompass me for that distant sleep
it would be a cloud from heaven,
God's cumulus breath, billowy and hushed.

If I could choose the craft
on which to place
my soul to loft it skyward
it would be an eagle's wing
ascending silent on earth's thermal breeze.

Nad Richard Brown

And Where Were You?

"I don't even know how to visit New Mexico anymore. . . I guess there isn't going to be a time when I live like I lived."

-Carrie Fountain

Sometimes I worry I will have forgotten
the feels of torsos, arms,
the metronomes of human hearts,
being at Stella's with a friend,
leaning into the spittle of talk
over din of dishes and diners,
innocently opening our mouths,
bumping into strangers at their tasks,
and chatting with dressed-up people
during intermissions or before a movie starts.
Where were you, people ask, when Kennedy died?
Where were you when you first saw the planes
piercing the first, and then the second Tower?
I was not in Paris, Sydney, or Buenos Aires,
but in Palm Springs, not that far away,
staying in a two-bedroom
with my husband a couple of friends,
spring's blooms set to disappear sooner than
we knew.
There we were, going out as we pleased,
pushing the handles of self-serve,
zigzagging through outlets, bargain hunting
just because we could, buying clothes
we didn't know we'd have no place to wear.

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton



Laux, Deborah, "Invisible"
Mixed Media

River Watch

The river's cliffs throw color, pink with a lick of orange, into the waters.

Though rooted far out from the banks, means shine out the iron at the core.

River breath adds silver ruffles.

The sage-studded hills, tamarisk-trimmed, hold the current in invisible embrace.

River-steaming sounds do soothe sometimes, but tonight they leave us scattered.

Fragmented.

Still, the vespertine calls, knowing we are too movable to be rock, spreading shadows over our tensed foreheads, around our tight shoulders.

This cooling air, breezed by the dragonflies' whipping wings.

Forgive the staccato way I have been tracing through our days.

These are days we cannot have known before. How could we have prepared?

And even now, how can we know anything?

How can we know what to do, except by stilling in the pink-orange light, except by listening to our streaming rivers?

Susan Roche

Meditation: Pandemic as Reckoning

This time we're going deep
into our guts, our lungs, our hearts,
into interstices we haven't delved in a hundred years,
into the gaps we ignored, the places
that never healed from Jim Crow or white hoods
or the casual brutality that seems to hide in full view.
Into our hungry arms that must refrain from
hugging, from sharing our despair, our grief.

This time we're going back
into the family we don't claim,
people with skin or hair that doesn't match ours,
but as human as we are, and just
as easily sickened or killed. To the
brothers of our brothers, the sisters of our mothers,
the children who cry themselves to sleep
as though they were as afraid as we are.

This time let this strange space
in our busy lives grow as quiet as the white froth
on dandelions, a place to hear our own breathing.
A place to look at our hands and ask
How do we repent?
Where would we seek forgiveness?
And how can we reach out
to heal what is broken?

Gail G. S. Jennings



Ainbinder, Helene "A Zoom Shabbat Service"
Oil

Notes from the Quarantine

It is day 44 of *distancing*
and I have viewed
the true colors of lonely.

I've studied clouds,
delightful changelings—
alligators turning to elephants,

the ski boat we wanted
to the face of our son. Nightly,
I welcome Venus and twinkling satellites.

I squint to envision universes
beyond our milky wonder, ponder
the lifespan of stars, the locus of Kolob.

I miss the lowing of pasturing cows,
the passing perfume of a wandering skunk,
the misty tulle of a waterfall.

I miss people passing on the street,
their endless assortment of aura and beauty.
I ache for someone dying alone

without kin close and ministering.
I pray angels come to embrace
them in their lonely leaving.

Now I treasure the gray wren that lands on the fence,
the way she looks at me in my glass cage
and cocks her head.

I yearn to hold hands, kiss cheeks, run
unmasked, face to face into my new world
and never turn back.

Markay Brown



Tabor, Michael, "Prisoner of War"
Acrylic

Stay Calm and Carry On

With the pandemic in place, most stores are closed. Most stores in my town have signs in their window, "Stay calm and carry on."

I guess for some, being requested to stay home and indoors isn't too bad. My niece and nephew have to go to school on-line right now, and for gym, they are supposed to do jumping jacks in their room!

When I was in Jr. High, I hated school. Everyday was torture. I remember walking to school, and a retired man reclined on his front porch. I was envious, and wished I was in his position.

And this winter, I went to Skokie library, and an old man was sitting in a chair, taking a nap, while the sun shone down on him through a window. Once again, my ideal state of being!

So I will deal with my isolation, and solitude. Makes me picture, "The recline and fall of Western civilization."

Mark Hudson

August Visit, Month Six of Social Distancing --for Beth and Kayo

We linger in the carport, masked,
guitars and a basket of garden in hand,
zinnias, potatoes, zucchini and cucumbers,
tomatoes, basil snipped in blossom
and a poem penned on handmade paper,
for who knows when we'll meet again.

Eyes holding eyes, we delay our farewell
by talking of art, of turning clay slabs
to fine glazed bowls, of crafting plain words
into poems as the world sheds thorny stars
of its own creation, like clay from the wheel,
like words, wrung from the heart of us.

Let us go now, let us part, remember
the songs we played and sang together,
summertime, summertime and living
isn't easy, sorrow deep and melancholy
in its rhythms, needing to be sung.

Star Coulbrooke

INDEX BY AUTHOR

Anderson, Bonnie, "Lies of Life"	46
St. George, Ut.	
Asplund, O. William, "Contemplating Existence"	64
Layton, Ut.	
Ballam, Shanan, "Witness"	23
USU - Logan, Ut.	
Becerra, Papaya, "View From a Window"	33
Folsom, Ca.	
Boyden, Ann Marie, "Pause"	17
Boyden, Ann Marie, "Cooking in Quarantine"	18
Williamsburg, Virginia	
Brown, Markay, "Notes from the Quarantine"	113
St. George, Ut.	
Brown, Nad, "If I Could Choose"	107
St. George, Ut.	
Bushman-Carlton, Marilyn, "Cinnamon in a Pandemic"	10
Bushman-Carlton, Marilyn, "And Where Were You?"	108
Clearfield, Ut.	
Bussma, Marleen, "Viral Woes"	13
Bussma, Marleen, "She's Covid Free"	52
Dammeron Valley, Ut.	
Callahan, Colleen, "The Covid Dance Party"	47
St. Paul, Minnesota	
Clark, Mona Lee, "Corona"	35
St. George, Ut.	
Chiong, Raven, "Back to School in 2020"	61
Brasstown, North Carolina	
Christensen, Raymond D., "Monuments"	95
Christensen, Raymond D., "Chronicles of the Heart"	97
Clearfield, Ut.	
Cieslewicz, Kathy, "I Don't Know Said the Crow"	84
St. George, Ut.	

INDEX BY AUTHOR

Coulbrooke, Star, "After the Neighbors Re-Landscape,"	105
Coulbrooke, Star, "August Visit, Month Six of Social Distancing,"	116
USU Smithfield, Ut.	
Csenge, Debra, "Balance"	70
Csenge, Debra, "Strangest of Times"	72
Kanab, Ut.	
Cutler, Lindsay Stevenson, "Humanity in Crisis"	59
Cutler, Lindsay Stevenson, "Songbirds"	59
Cutler, Lindsay Stevenson, "A Quiet War"	59
Kaysville, Ut.	
DeCaria, Frank M., "Pandemic"	65
DeCaria, Frank M., "Strangers in Masks"	67
Clinton, Ut.	
DeLuca, Gregory, "Covid and the Cold"	76
Ivins, Ut.	
Ellsworth, Fae, "Before Sleep"	31
Ellsworth, Fae, "Desert Grace"	31
Virgin, Ut.	
Feehan, Denis, "The Ogre"	48
Feehan, Denis "Isolation"	49
Mesquite, Nev.	
Floyd, Lin, "The Mystery"	50
Floyd, Lin, "Why,"	50
St. George, Ut.	
Fowler, Candy Lish, "Quarantine . . . 88"	16
St. George, Ut.	
Funke, Barbara, "Masked"	15
St. George, Ut.	
Gipson, Sara, "The 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic"	98
Scott, Arkansas	
Grissom, Gina, "Covid Haiku"	54
Grissom, Gina, "Pandemic Memories"	54
St. George, Ut.	

INDEX BY AUTHOR

Gustavson, Lisa, "Pandemic Poker".....	75
Sandy, Ut.	
Hopkinson, Trish, "Paused".....	12
Hopkinson, Trish, "I want to order room service".....	74
Provo, Ut.	
Hudson, Mark, "The Wisdom of Children".....	63
Hudson, Mark, "Stay Calm and Carry On".....	115
Evanston, Illinois	
Jennings, Gail, "Meditation: Pandemic as Reckoning".....	111
Holladay, Ut.	
Jessen, Grace Diane, "By The Numbers".....	57
Jessen, Grace Diane, "Pandemic Plight".....	58
Glenwood, Ut.	
Jones, Christopher, "Clinically Effective for SARS-CoV2 Relief".....	77
St. George, Ut.	
Kirkham, Kate, "To Form a More Perfect Union".....	25
Ephraim, Ut.	
Knowlton, David Clark, "In That Field, Wire Blooms".....	21
Knowlton, David Clark, "Pastorale".....	20
Salt Lake City, Ut..	
Kruse, Michael J. "Pandemonium,".....	86
Kruse, Michael J. "He asked for help and they turned him away".....	88
St. George, Ut.	
Leth, Sue Stevenson, "Robust Rampage".....	39
Leth, Sue Stevenson, "Covid Hysteria".....	41
St. George, Ut.	
Mangen, Sylvia, "Pandemic Paradoxes".....	24
St. George, Ut.	
Marshall, Marilyn, "We Lost Our Senses with Covid 19".....	92
Marshall, Marilyn, "Lots of Tears".....	94
Magna, Ut.	
McGraw, Kathleen, "This I Do Not Love".....	100
McGraw, Kathleen, "Staying Sane".....	101
St. George, Ut.	

INDEX BY AUTHOR

Mejdrich, Mary Ann, "Covid 19"	89
St. George, Ut.	
Montague, Kolette, "No Place to Run"	103
Montague, Kolette, "Quietude"	104
Centerville, Ut.	
Nelson-Harrington, Jolayne, "I Thought"	22
St. George, Ut.	
Read, Eric, "A Covid-19 Conundrum"	91
Brigham City, Ut.	
Richardson, Marilyn, "Wail Whimper Whine"	102
Ivins, Ut.	
Rippy, Bob, "Boccaccio on Plagues"	43
Rippy, Bob, "Living With The Virus"	45
Roche, Susan, "River Watch"	110
Castle Valley, Ut.	
Spears, Michael J. "Covid Revolutions"	29
Plain City, Ut.	
Stradley, Shawn Dallas, "Painting in a Cave"	68
Salt Lake City, Ut.	
Timm, Isaac, "COVID"	73
USU, Logan, Ut.	
Tollstrup, Marie, "Paradise in Freefall"	36
Tollstrup, Marie, "Captive in Covid Orbit"	38
St. George, Ut.	
Webb, Rachael, "The Plot of Two Sinister Cousins"	27
St. George, Ut.	
Williams, Shane, "Covid Nursery Rhymes"	26
St. George, Ut.	
Zambrano, Marty, "Pandemic Contemplation"	51
Nampa, Idaho	
Zollinger, Leah, "Covid Coping"	91
St. George, Ut.	

INDEX BY ARTIST

Ainbinder, Helene, "A Zoom Shabbat Service"	112
Oil	
Bettilyon, Karen, "Caretaker Now"	32
Watercolors	
Blakely, Glen, "Covid 19 'WHO'"	66
Blakely, Glen, "Hope through Humor"	42
Paper	
Cieslewicz, Kathy, "I Don't Know, Said the Crow"	85
Oil	
Clark, Sylvia T., "First Light 2020—Time Space Energy"	37
Mixed Media	
Ellsworth, Fae, "Birds of a Feather"	30
Mixed Media	
Gallagher, Sage, "Window on Our World"	99
Oil	
Gentry, Carmen, "Good Bye Uncle Evelio"	34
Acrylic	
Gerlach, Carol, "Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the safest of us all"	56
Multi Media	
Gillespie, Pattie, "The Relationship of Time in Isolation"	71
Mixed Media	
Graebner, Diane, "We Have To Do It!"	11
Mixed Media	
Grow, Mary Jane, "Taken for Granted"	53
Oil	
Harlin, Judith, "You Count"	93
Colored Pencil	
Jackson, Kimberly, "Rolling Emotion"	40
Watercolor	

INDEX BY ARTIST

Last, Cassandra, "And So This Is Life"	14
Acrylic	
Laux, Deborah, "Invisible"	109
Mixed Media	
Lineweaver, Jenna, "Pandemic 2020: Homeschooling, & Hatching Butterflies"	60
Oil and Mixed Media	
Lopez, Mari, "The Healing Garden"	106
Acrylic/gold	
Manning, Mary, "Mother Goddess Heals Earth"	19
Acrylic/gold	
Northcott, Ginny, "Sketching From Home"	87
iPad/stylus	
Rawson, Miriam, "I Miss My Grandkids"	62
Oil	
Scott, Mel, "Global Peril"	96
Egg Tempura	
Tabor, Michael, "Prisoner of War"	114
Acrylic	
Williams, LuAnn, "Caution - COVID 19"	90
Oil	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

St. George Literary Arts Festival COVID Memorial Staff:

Sue Stevenson Leth, *Project Editor*
Ernie Doose, *Arts, Inc. Financial Administrator*
Christopher Jones, *Cover Design*
Markay Brown, *Formatting Text Editor*
Cathy Ceslewicz, *Art Curator*
Josh Segovia, *Photography*
Denis Feehan, *Manager Distribution Services*
Marie Tollstrup, *"Remembering 2020" transcript*

The Art of Isolation would not have been possible without Washington County RAP tax funding. We acknowledge with great appreciation their financial efforts in our behalf.



