

# THE CURVE

A JOURNAL  
OF POETRY  
PROSE  
AND  
VISUAL ART

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# FOREWORD

## DEAREST READER,

You hold in your hands a slice of local history. This is the story of how the University of Colorado students, faculty, and Denver/Aurora community chose to respond to extreme adversity during the COVID-19 pandemic: with creativity, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to each other. After clerkship rotations and didactics became virtual—along with what felt like the entire city shutting down—we were asked to help guide our peers through this confusing, frightening new world. This movement was the brainchild of a handful of Colorado medical students and faculty who came together during the start of the pandemic to serve a new need in our community. We were also grappling with our identity as professionals, feeling both called to action and also scared for our own lives, as we faced the start of our careers in the midst of a deadly pandemic, along with so many other workers, families, and communities. One of our wonderful faculty advisors, Dr. Gaetan Sgro, came up with *The Curve* as a unifying concept – a play on being flexible when life throws a “curveball” (or five hundred) and also a nod to the ubiquitous phrase “flatten the curve,” the goal of social distancing.

At the helm of this project, we had several luminary educators, including Drs. Tess Jones, Tai Lockspeiser, Gaetan Sgro, Shanta Zimmer, Regina Richards, Jackie Glover, and many others who mentored and guided these crucial conversations. We, the students, stumbled through hours of Zoom calls, group messages, Google Docs, and Canvas quirks with the shared goal of building a new community for students to find connection and meaning in a time defined by death, dying, and sudden losses. From this team snowballed an outpouring of projects and connections. We developed curricula for the Bioethics and Humanities pillar of our medical school’s newly-minted COVID-19 course, including small-group writing workshops, soul-searching debates from PPE resource allocation to effects of the pandemic on underserved communities, and reflections on what it means to be humane when the world as we knew it was disappearing. We created the WordPress [pandemic-poetry.com](https://pandemic-poetry.com) to share the outpouring of creative work with the broader community. We began Open Mic Fridays to share slam poetry readings, music performances, photography, and reflections. We invited students, faculty, and community members to publish and share work outside of our classroom. From all of this came collaborations with Narrative Medicine thinkers and writers at the University of Pittsburgh, Stanford’s *Medicine and the Muse* project, *TalkRx*, *The Lighthouse Writer’s Workshop*, and *The Human Touch*.

At its heart, *The Curve* was (and is) a collaborative reminder that we can empower each other to survive and thrive, even in the midst of global emergency. Creative expression can be a means to find purpose in our reality and to support friends, families, neighbors, and community members. Creativity can even help us to slow down and extend some kindness towards ourselves. We hope this next incarnation of *The Curve* brings you as much joy as it brought us to see the concept—and you all— take off and grow wings during truly difficult times. May you find something good, or challenging, or comforting in these pages; take some small joys in the process of being human today, and continue to create together. Onward, adventurers!

## WITH LOVE,

Meha, Priya, Carolyn, & Sabio  
CUSOM Classes of 2020 & 2021

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## AFTERWORD

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## \_\_planes in the sky\_\_

Beguiled by the sight of our eyes,  
even the power of perception is vulnerable  
-to the seduction of space & time

In the distant horizon it moves..

“Hahaa It’s tiny. Look, I could squoosh it between my fingers. Hahaa”

-----

From the nosebleeds the numbers are indiscernible,  
and so we watch the screen to keep score..  
3/29, 10 days of diarrhea<sup>1</sup>

usurped in our undies,  
with our cares scattered on the floor..

<sup>1</sup> On March 29th there were a cumulative 34,074 people who had died as a result of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus>). Further, the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, & Risk factors Study (GBD) found that an estimated 3,408 people die per day from diarrheal illnesses (with about 1,220 of those being children under the age of 5 years old)-so over the course of ten days, an estimated 34,080 people of all ages die of diarrhea globally (<http://www.healthdata.org/research-article/estimates-global-regional-and-national-morbidity-mortality-and-aetiologies-0>).

\* Of note, in the GBD it was found that there were 9,507 people who died of diarrheal diseases in the US (of which 353 were people under the age 5)- so in ten days an estimated 260 people of all ages die of diarrhea in the US.

\* The number of annual deaths due to diarrhea have been decreasing by about 3% annually, while deaths due to covid-19 have been doubling within a week’s time, so let it be known that this is parallel is not drawn to make slight of the current pandemic, but rather to just give some context as we view tally marks attempting to represent human lives and ponder when and why respond.

### ■ DAVID SABIO

a really lucky kid who cares and shares  
born free, at times forgetting, eternally blessed  
sabio <3 :D

## HOW TO LIVE IN A SMALL ROOM

### WITH FIVE STRANGERS FOR SIX MONTHS

You will want to keep to yourself,  
Maybe not always,  
But at least sometimes,  
And if not at first,  
Eventually.  
This will not be an option.  
Take a walk every day.  
You will need somewhere nearby  
A church, maybe—a bar is better.  
When they're open.  
But the sun will go down every day,  
And you will walk up the steps  
And down the hall  
to the door of the room.  
You will look around.  
You will know that privacy is  
Untenable.  
Your anger will stitch together  
those walls and  
pull the strings tight.  
Sit near the windows  
And let the anger  
Seep out your nostrils  
Out above the street.

#### ■ JIM PAVLIK

Jim Pavlik is a Sr. PRA in the Department of Psychiatry. He lives in Arvada with his wife, 4-year-old daughter, a dog, two cats, and three fish. His new hobby is trying to draw birds, a task which has proven to be far harder than he had anticipated.



# THE MODULUS OF RUPTURE

This is a difficult calculus  
To determine the ratio of stress  
To the integrity of the mind.  
An appropriate structure,  
One fit to live within,  
One affording a modicum of safety  
from the elements,  
Dependable shelter.  
The elasticity of the mind has its limit  
And a proper mathematics  
Must consider the magnitude of the forces,  
Their duration,  
change over time,  
The directionality of pressure,  
And their source.  
The resulting volume  
Will alter the rigidity of the structure  
And determine which forms  
Are adaptive  
Or destructive.  
Every defense an additional weakness  
Every exposure an avenue for escape

## ■ JIM PAVLIK

Jim Pavlik is a Sr. PRA in the Department of Psychiatry. He lives in Arvada with his wife, 4-year-old daughter, a dog, two cats, and three fish. His new hobby is trying to draw birds, a task which has proven to be far harder than he had anticipated.

## A Covid Indifference: contentedly disheveled



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### ■ BRENT CARR

Dr. Carr is a psychiatrist at the University of Florida College of Medicine who sub-specializes in neuromodulation and college health. He completed his residency in New Orleans at Tulane University.

## A FATHER'S APOLOGY

I am sorry, my child.  
As you bake the father's day cake for me  
I see your eyes glimmering with glee  
Singing to celebrate how wonderful a dad am I  
Deep down silently, I cry  
I cry because I've failed you  
As a parent, as a guardian  
I am ashamed at the kind of world I've brought you in  
A world where you'll be judged by the color of your skin  
Where your life and death will be contingent  
On how more or less pigment  
you're blessed with  
A world where you will be judged, and looked at, and disrespected  
And compared and suspected  
Just because you look different  
A world where you will be restricted  
from loving whomever makes your heart flutter  
You will be bound by the gender roles of the so called normal  
The way you dress, the way you look, the language you speak and the gender you love,  
will decide your destiny  
Not your education, your knowledge, your wisdom, your grit or your integrity  
You'll be scared of every police van, every siren,  
every strange look and you'll not know why  
How much ever you try.  
So my dear child, as run my fingers through the "Happy Father's Day, papa"  
scribbled on a card you so lovingly made  
I apologize, for leaving you amidst the ruins of hate  
For not being the father you deserved  
For the lies I told you that it's a beautiful world.

■ **JASMINE ARNEJA**

Jasmine Arneja is a Dental graduate from the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine. A true Aquarius at heart, she loves to express herself in all forms of art.

# A SOLE THOUGHT OUTLOUD

## (NO NEED TO WRAP IT SO TIGHT)

How have we managed to cultivate a societal norm  
of being incapable of talking about the one certainty

About one of the inherent elements that unites Us All  
on a fundamental level, more base than beliefs or values

And how the fuck do we draw lines  
on that which isn't ours

“Go head n try-  
Try to suss out who and what came from which stars”

And please inform me as to what divinity,  
decreed that there be such entitled beings

So hide behind the collage of belongings,  
but know that you can't take our soul

-----

I was born and I will die

I was born and I will die

I was born. I will die.

This is a gift

### ■ DAVID SABIO

a really lucky kid who cares and shares  
born free, at times forgetting, eternally blessed  
sabio <3 :D

## ALL ALONE AT THE WATERING HOLE



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### ■ WILLA WANG

Willa Wang is in 7th grade and enjoys mosaics and painting. All Alone at the Watering Hole was created during Covid to remember her trip to the Kalahari just prior to Covid travel restrictions.



## AND THE BIRDS SANG ON

It was a silent spring.

We didn't realize the canaries  
had been silent for months

Because the murmur of human industry said  
Don't stop.  
You're not allowed.  
The people need  
more.  
Those flowers just cause allergies.  
Rip the beds clean,  
and plant rows of concrete instead.

It was a silent spring.  
The wind prowled our grey fields  
hungry for prey,  
but found only itself  
on barren street corners.

Once prevalent honks and shouts  
were replaced by the demure hum  
of fugitive tires,  
escaping to forage  
for sparse necessities,  
returning empty handed  
to their cells  
as the stillness  
patrolled outside.

Beneath our feet  
a multitude of activity buzzed.  
Green shoots pushed through the narrow gaps  
of our concrete monoliths  
tentatively reaching for the sun's renewed  
brightness  
as winds gently pushed away  
the layer of industry that sat over the city.

Opposite the sun salutations,  
Roots splayed underground  
Working into the cracks of our foundations

Slowly pushing into the vacuums of our minds  
germinating until the call of the wild  
was too much to bear.  
We thrust our snouts to the bars of our cages  
and howled  
submission  
powerlessness  
brokenness

We cried out for forgiveness  
for the scars we left on the lands

But as we had turned our backs on nature,  
she too had forgotten us.

Leaving us to rot in our concrete prisons  
as canaries flitted from tree to tree  
singing their glories to the heavens

amidst the quietest spring I have ever known.

### ■ KESTUTIS MICKE

Kestutis Micke is a genetic counselor that wishes he had more time for writing.

## Auntie and Niece, there is still happiness



■ **CHRISTINA HOBSON**

My name is Christina Hobson, and I work in the School of Medicine – Family Medicine. I enjoy snapping photos to remind myself of the beauty that is all around us, especially in this unprecedented time.

## BEE

This spring  
I drew a picture  
of me and my daughter  
sitting in a meadow.  
A bee buzzes just above our heads.

I showed it to a friend.  
It is about the pandemic,  
I said.  
She's never been stung by a bee.  
I'm not going to move,  
I'm going to stay calm,  
I want to protect her  
From this little thing that could be  
big  
but I don't know if I can.

My friend laughed.  
That's funny,  
she said,  
I think of bees as benevolent  
messengers.

■ ARYN BARTLEY

Aryn Bartley teaches writing and literature at Lane Community College in Eugene, OR.



## BEHIND THE MASK I'VE WORN SO LONG

I've broken out in hives, first time in my life,  
eighty-four years without ever having them.  
I'm sure it's from long-buried stress, born  
in a war over fifty years ago. In those days,  
I couldn't trust people on the street and open-air  
market, as I drove an open jeep to the airfield.

*Does that man looking at me plan to lob  
a grenade in my jeep? Does that scowling  
woman walking next to the road have a gun  
tucked in her long black sleeves?*

Today before I shop at the local grocery store,  
I fit a mask to my face and pull on gloves  
to protect me from a virus that's killing many.  
I cannot trust the people I see in the store.  
Any could carry, pass me the virus, casually.

*Did that woman, that one not wearing gloves,  
handle this box of cereal I just put into my cart?  
Did that unmasked man cough on my apples?  
Did a stocker with the virus shelve my cheese  
or carton of milk while not wearing a mask?*

My every-day fear in that long-ago war was  
that this was the day when that golden bullet,  
the one with my name inscribed on it in script,  
would find me as I passed by, taking my life.

Today the death wouldn't be sudden, riding  
a bright red tracer stream from a gun hidden  
in a tree line or the edge of a jungle clearing.  
Today it would come from a cough, a sneeze,  
a covert viral bullet on something I touch,  
then touch my face in an unconscious gesture,  
to scratch an itch, wipe away laughter's tears.

And so, fears held tight many years in the  
fist of memory are loose, crawl up my arms  
in itchy red blotches.

### ■ ART ELSER

Art Elser has published five books of poetry, including *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* and *It Seemed Innocent Enough*.

# CALM

Did you hear the **calm**?

Did it reveal the agitation that has been assigned to you?

*As multiple essential transformations blew past at speeds that made it  
impossible to comprehend more than the shape of each,  
my feet were nested in a buried desire for stillness*

I don't want to go back

I want to move forward with my unearthed appreciation for **calm**.

■ **LYNDY BUSH**

A New Mexican oil painter that aims to capture human experience in relation to nature and objects.



I want to embrace you, yet I can't  
I see the sparkle of your eyes as they glisten from unshed worry  
Six feet away, but still too proud to share the load

I notice the wrinkles of your forehead as the gravity becomes palpable  
Visibly I swallow, too consumed to share my fears

Your smile I do not see, and I wonder if I ever will  
I imagine your cracked lips quivering quietly almost as silently as the prayer that moves them  
I hear my voice as it joins yours

Separated by space because of immunity  
Mine competent, yours compromised

■ **ALICIA PUGH**

Alicia Pugh is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Illinois at Chicago and enjoys volunteering in her free time.

## CHOICE

We who complain about restrictions on going to the park  
We who huff about long lines at the grocery store - are they really  
Still out of flour? Can you look in the back?  
We who order take out, who can buy 2 weeks of food in  
One day. Who can receive a full paycheck  
Wearing a robe, walking our dogs in the sun  
At noon.

My husband keeps the pump running in Aurora,  
Assuring all of us who bought crates of bottled water  
That we were tricked by panic.  
We will be okay.

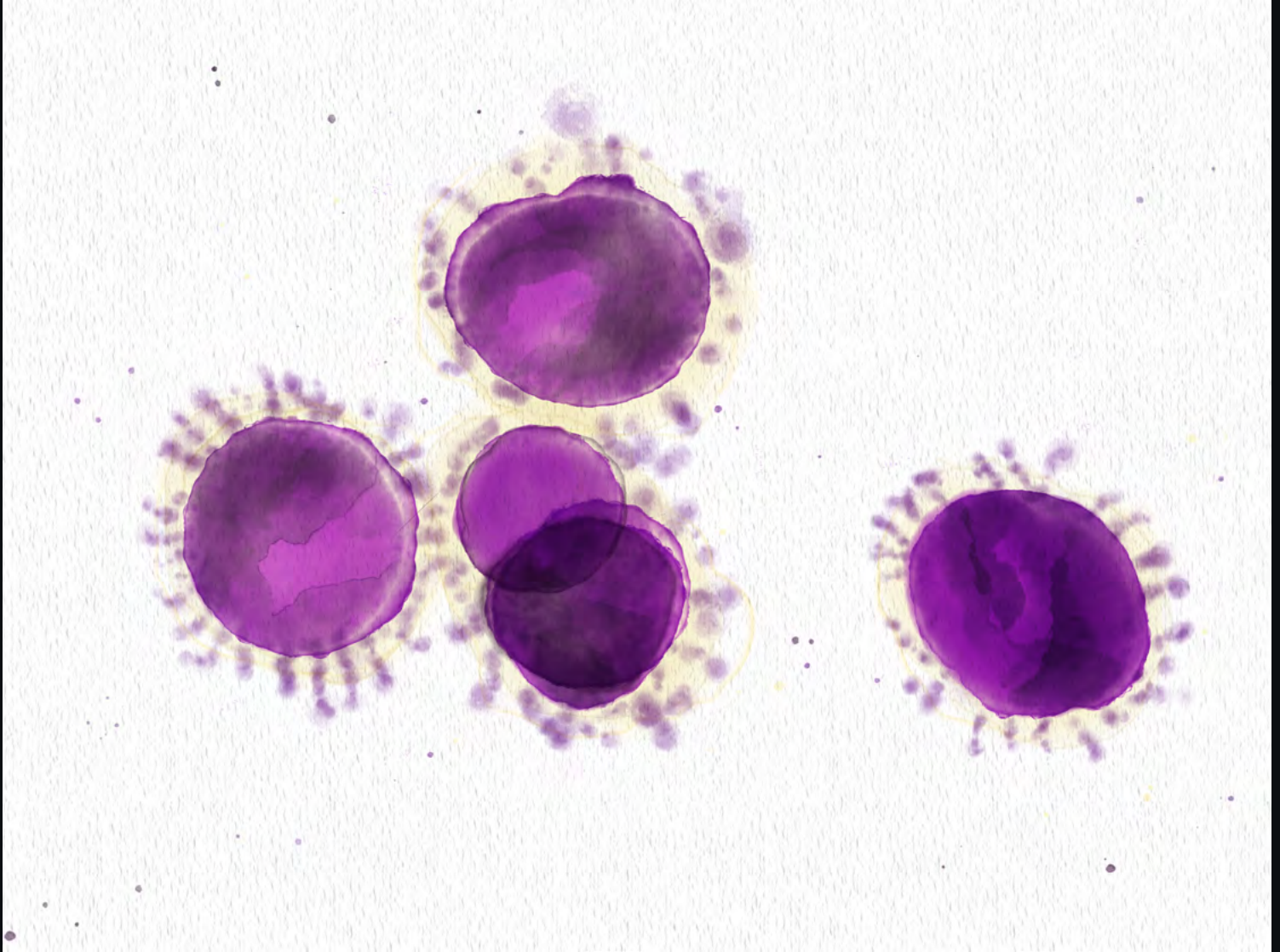
Things are tense at work, for him - and yet -  
The contractors assure the laborers that no one is sick  
That they don't need to worry  
And actually, a cold is going around  
So if you feel that tickle in your lungs,  
Sore throat,  
It's probably just the cold.  
His sixty-five year old coworker,  
Getting radiation treatment,  
A wife with MS,  
Doesn't believe in it.  
It's overblown. Doomers.  
Someone's gotta work.

Maybe it's easier to not believe it,  
When you don't have a choice.

### ■ MONICA FITZGERALD

Monica Fitzgerald is a Master of Public Health student at the Colorado School of Public Health in the Community and Behavioral Health Department.

## COPING WITH COVID-19



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### ■ LYNN DOAN

Lynn Doan, DDS, is currently a dentist in Aurora, CO. She is passionate about helping people in the community become a healthier and happier version of themselves.

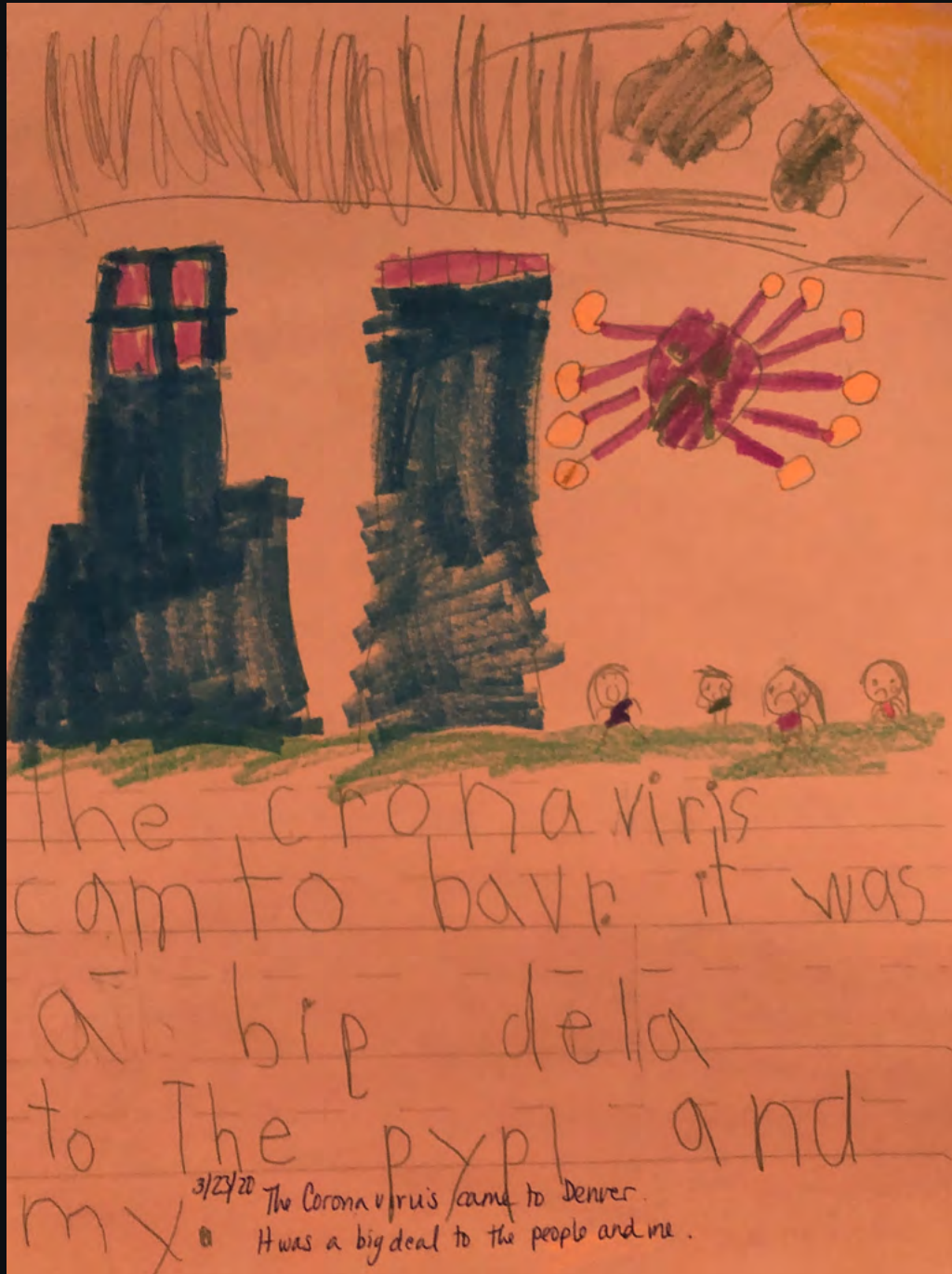


# COVID COMMUNICATION



■ NICOLE DEFENBAUGH

## COVID THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD\_1

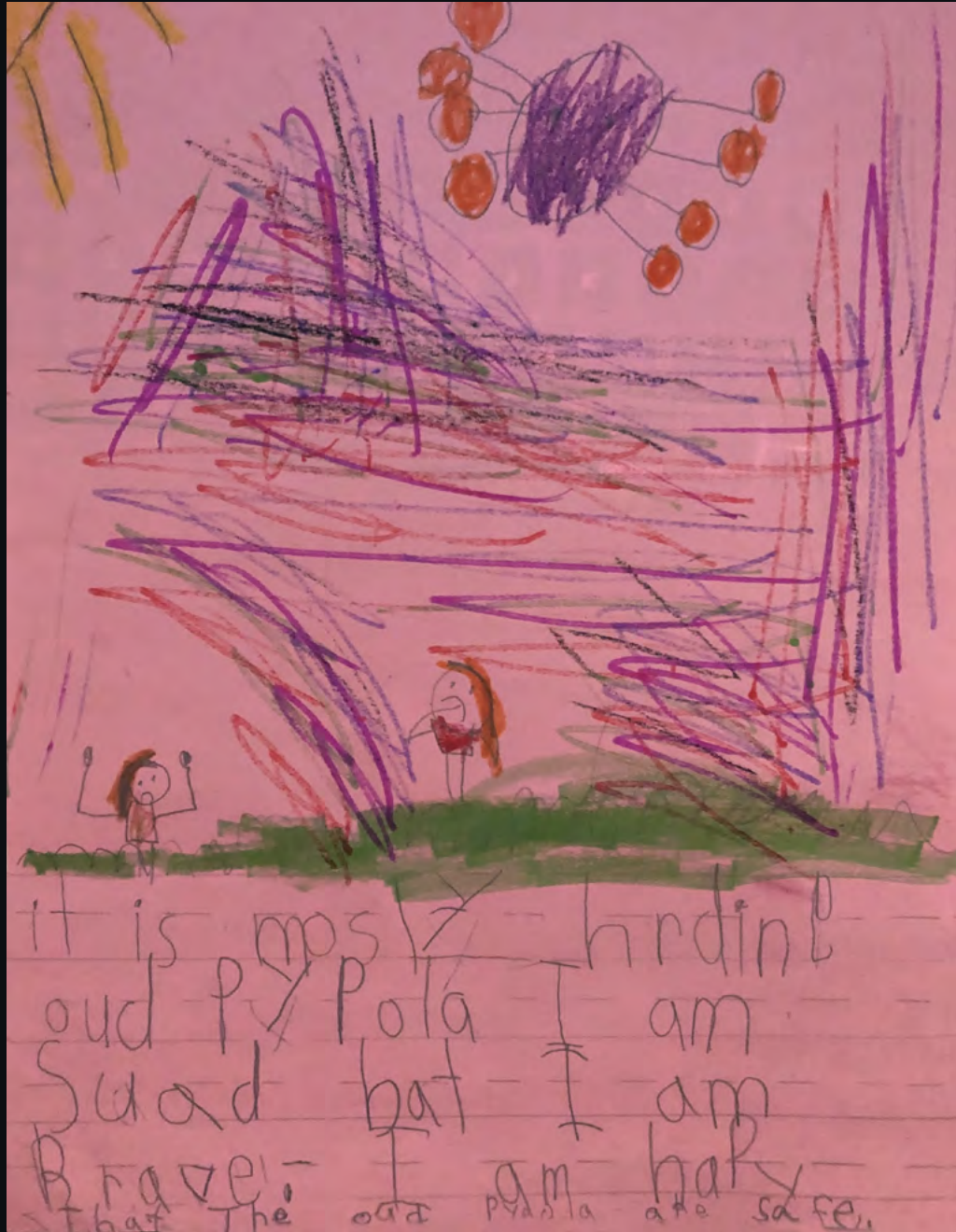


■ KRISTIN FURFARI AND MABEL HARTMAN, AGE 5

"The coronavirus came to Denver. It was a big deal to the people and me."  
To remember this surreal and challenging time, I've asked my 5 year old daughter to write a journal; every day she makes a new page. Her thoughts help me stay grounded as I balance my roles as a mother and hospitalist.



## COVID THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD\_2

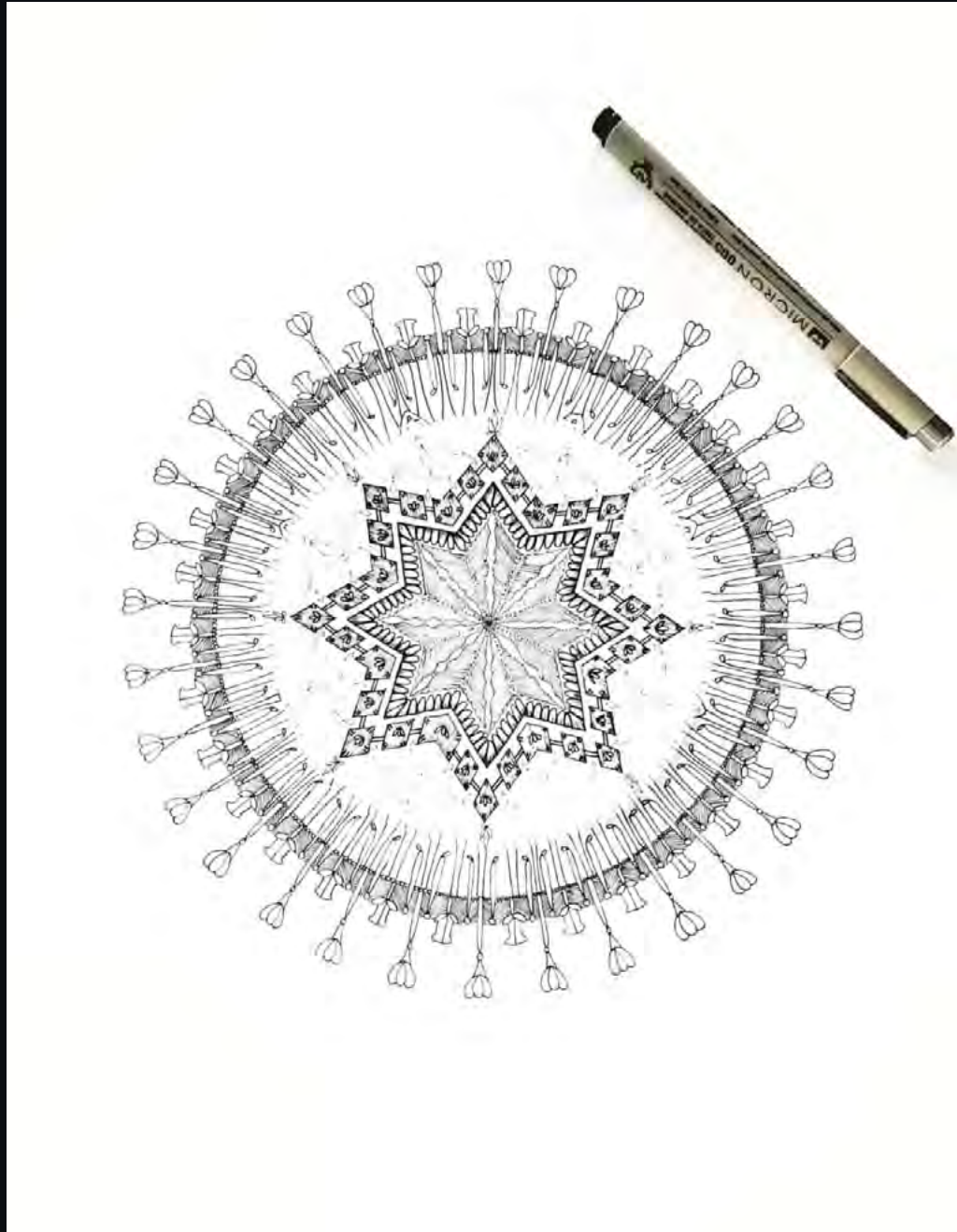


■ KRISTIN FURFARI AND MABEL HARTMAN, AGE 5

"It is mostly hurting old people. I am sad but I am brave. I am happy the old people are safe."  
To remember this surreal and challenging time, I've asked my 5 year old daughter to write a journal; every day she makes a new page. Her thoughts help me stay grounded as I balance my roles as a mother and hospitalist.



## COVID-19 VIRUS DOODLE



### ■ JUNE HOMDAYJANAKUL

June Homdayjanakul is a DrPH student at the Colorado School of Public Health. She studies emerging infectious diseases and has a research interest in the decolonization of global health.

## DAILY REPETITION OF NORTH TABLE



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■ LARA CANHAM

Lara is a faculty member and alumna of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program.



# ENCEPHALOPATHY

She was five or maybe six  
Pale skin, brown hair, bright eyes  
It was evening  
We glimpsed her through the door  
As the nurse exited the room to explain the call  
Her screams echoed in the hall  
Her father slipped out, face haunted  
"The hardest part," he said, "is when she looks me in the eye  
And asks me who I am"  
We entered cautiously  
Helped her mother walk her to the bathroom  
She was confused; she was weak  
We asked them to tell us about their daughter  
Before she got sick  
This isn't her, they said again and again  
"What does it mean, encephalopathy?" they asked  
Exhaustion in their faces  
Their world upended  
We listened  
We made a plan for the night  
Asked if they felt safe  
"...Yes, we feel safe", the dad said  
As if safety wasn't the issue  
Safety was smaller than sanity in this moment  
"How long?" they asked. "How long until return to normal?"  
Where was their daughter  
Who loved animals and art  
Later in the night I returned  
To see how she was doing  
Hesitance on the parents faces  
But the girl smiled when I entered  
"Can I have a hug?" she asked  
I went to hug her instinctively  
Feeling happiness as the parents looked to me  
"This is her," they said  
But even as I felt their joy  
I felt a wave of guilt and uncertainty and fear and sorrow  
For the moment I realized  
I couldn't hug my patient.

Then I returned to the work room  
Sat with the black monitor in front of me watching red numbers tick upward  
And wondered at the cost of a hug

## ■ LYNDSEY COLE

Lyndsey is a 1st year fellow physician in Pediatric Infectious Diseases and Rheumatology.

## EXIT WOUNDS

Moon crater calluses, gunshot wounds  
bubbling through sandpaper skin  
in the cocoon of the trauma ICU,  
teddy bears and Tupac,  
a crisp offering of school backpack and waiter's uniform  
on the bedside chair,  
markers of missed shifts and tips and algebra classes  
and family dinners and mama's desperate embrace.

On the second day I pry the bullet from your back,  
maroon-battered sliver, seedling of terror.  
You slurp and spit water  
through the tape deck of your gap-littered teeth,  
tape and bandages I peel back  
to crowds of expectant pores and bashful scars,  
a small trauma, the daily ritual of dressing and redressing your wounds,  
french fry grease from my lunch still singeing my finger flesh.

You beg for blankets,  
cocooning into sweat puddle safety  
with palms too old for your hands,  
sobbing like nighttime hopscotch,  
tripping away from the glaze caking the insides of your eyelids,  
the redblue flicker on the dying begonias in your yard,  
right hand to your wallet in your pocket  
before remembering what mama told you, both hands up in sight and now  
you've done everything right,  
everything right and still the world turns its back on you, you realize,  
and your relief is snowfall, quiet and deep,  
your relief is the small fact of your exhale in the trachea-tugging air  
before the frost-curdled trigger.

■ PRIYA KRISHNAN

Priya is a 2020 CUSOM grad. She is a surgery resident in Portland and loves music and the mountains.



## FREE AS A TRAPPED BIRD



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■ KATHARINE SMITH

Katharine Smith is a wife, mother, artist, and small shop owner. She resides in Colorado.



■ MARK EARNEST

Mark Earnest is a Professor of Medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine. He is an avid photographer, an enthusiastic husband, a full-service father of two teenagers, a back country skier, a weekend cook, and a closeted guitarist.



## GOAL /// SCORER

“It’s the same old line. The silence speaks volumes.”

“So, would you say that it’s important for you to work toward a solution?”

“Definitely! That’s the goal, to fight for the cause.”

“So, if you were told that the solution could be found,  
if you’re not around, would you step away?”

..the silence speaks volumes

.....

she sent us zillow pics of the place- with the price,

the corporal response- “You’re not doing anything illegal.”

let us ask inwardly and to our fellows with proud shoulders..

what do you want more-

for people to be healed,

or for you to do the healing

for the solution to be found,

or for you to do the solving

for the team to win it all,

or for you to hit the game winner

don’t be those birds that gave it away in ‘15,

don’t let that unsettling end of 49 be in vain<sup>1</sup>

priorities over politics,

goals over egos

*‘That look in her eyes.. it seems genuine, true ..I just wonder if it’s new’*

*\* Please continue perusing this page to enjoy some footnotes expounding the possibly puzzling numericals amidst this piece, with a focus upon the fan frenzied spectacle that is American football.*

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<sup>1</sup> birds, ‘15, 49.. The Seattle Seahawks (birds) had the ball on the 1 yardline against the new England Patriots in Super Bowl XLIX (49) on February 1st of 2015 (‘15), it was 2nd down and goal, with Marshawn Lynch in the backfield, surely ‘Beast Mode’ would hammer it home, and the birds would be back-to-back Super Bowl champs.. Instead what took place was what has been recognized as the worst play call in NFL history – Seattle ran a pass play and it got picked off. There was a great deal of discussion over the politics of this play call in that some wanted quarterback Russell Wilson to be credited with the game winning touchdown rather than Lynch. Wilson was the epitome of a clean-cut posterboy, while ‘Beast Mode’ was viewed as rough around the edges and unabashed in his expression. Either way, neither wound up holding the Pete Rozeelle Trophy for the Super Bowl MVP, and none of the birds got rings, none held the Vince Lombardi Trophy for the Super Bowl winning team, and just like everyone now- none of those birds went to Disneyland or Disneyworld, a tradition of champions dating back to 1987.

### ■ DAVID SABIO

a really lucky kid who cares and shares  
born free, at times forgetting, eternally blessed  
sabio <3 :D





## HEALTHCARE HERO



### ■ BRIANNA SLATNICK

Brianna Slatnick is a general surgery resident, artist, and surgical innovation fellow at Boston Children's Hospital. She specializes in watercolor floral anatomy and abstract anatomy art.

## HOME

Most nebulously, the shutting down of civilization has created a transformation in perception; home is no longer a place I go after a long shift to sleep and recuperate for tomorrow's action; it is my sanctuary, my palace of darkness with its shuttered windows, tucked away from the pedestrians strolling in the street. Home is unperturbed, except by the most egregious of violations; its walls and its center the bulwark against the forces conspiring outside. It is my prison; it is my castle. Its armor no more impenetrable than my own. The foundation cracks run long, and worm their way into my thoughts, where they plant seeds of doubt and fear, and maybe kick up a touch of nearly imperceptible dust. What an unacceptable landing... If it were not for the crisis, how would I know anything? How would I be otherwise forced to come to terms with anything... I could just exist in an infinite world of possibilities only attached to me by the random nature of creativity of thought... of things that I suspected, but could not quite bring myself to contend. Isn't that the beauty of this?

//

The layers are the worst part; I can always feel them wash over me, like a fortune teller, casting my fate one line at a time. They approach from near, coming suddenly up out of the well, until I am drenched, still standing motionless over the pit below, wondering just how far I am from the ledge, and just how deep the abyss is. Nothing is ever known with these things - it is both possible to overinterpret and underinterpret - to suffer a thousand fold more or less than what is absolutely required. It is the pity of unsettled fates; of dies waiting to be thrown; their destiny not yet established in the tapestry of the world.

//

Time. Time has become meaningless. There are daylight hours and meetings and things that need to be done, but the clock no longer marches to the beat of its own drum as it had every moment before, in the din of medical school and lectures and small groups and clinic and OR and prerounding and rounding, and going home at night on the bus, waiting for it to arrive, always late. It's all washed away. Journaling is the only reason that I can perceive how long I've been in this state, the tide having long crept in and dragged the tick marks from the beach back into the sea off the coast of my deserted island. I'm going bored with my usual distractions, and the work drags pain into my spine from all the sitting I would never do. This lagoon is not one with a shipwreck I can fashion to set sail for civilization, but only the port of call for an absconded vessel.

### ■ HANS ANDERSON

Hans Anderson, PhD, is a fourth year medical student in the MSTP, writer, and filmmaker.

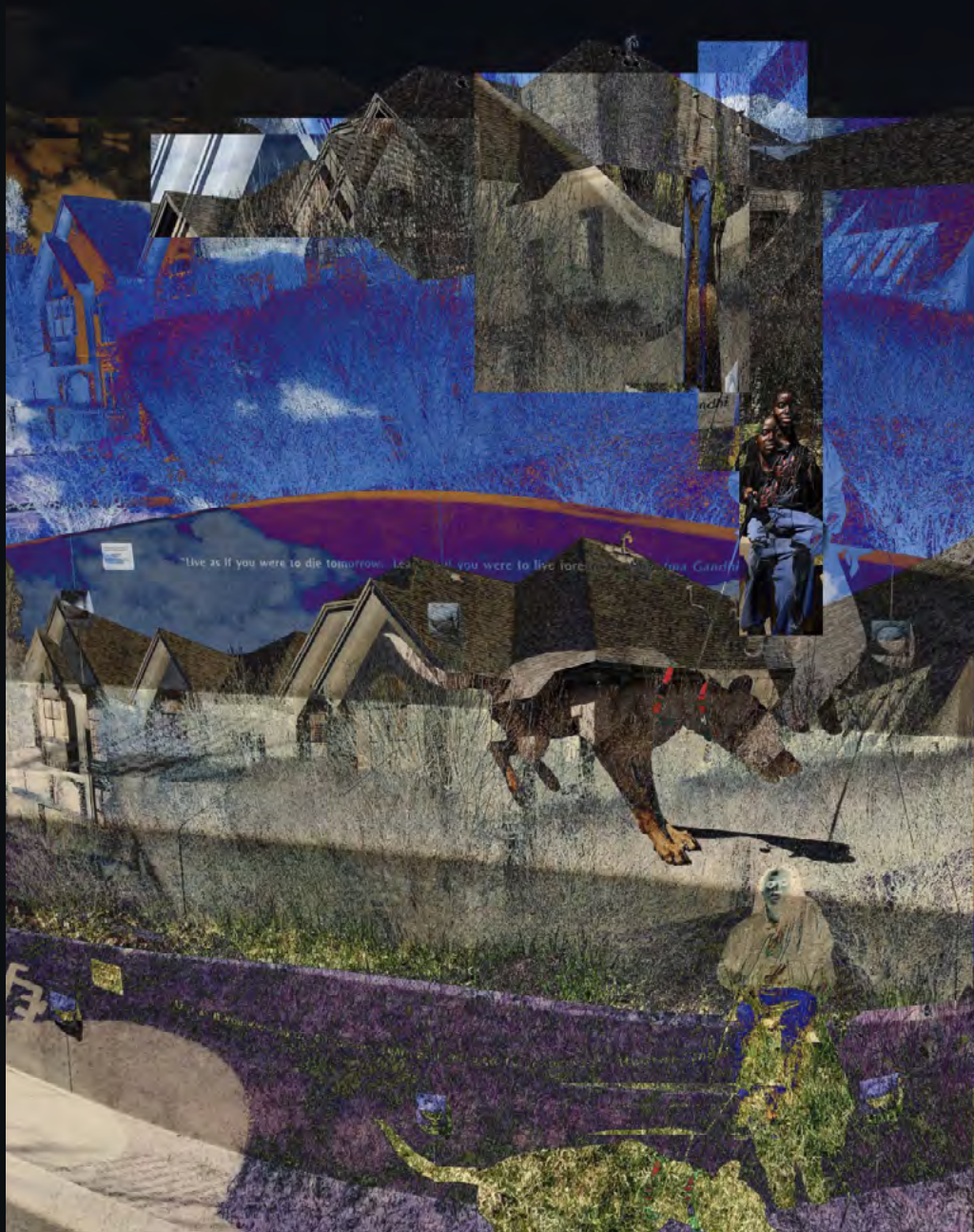
HOPE



■ CHRISTINA ARNOLD



# I REMEMBER



■ DAVID SABIO

a really lucky kid who cares and shares  
born free, at times forgetting, eternally blessed  
sabio <3 :D

## IN LIGHT OF THE END

She first heard of the virus from a friend at work. He said it was going to burn across the world like the fires of the month before. While her colleagues exchanged pressured concerns she hung back, unconvinced – she was certain that there were immovable constants, unswayable by human disease.

The following days brought more stories of the spread. Pockets of the world succumbed rapidly in incendiary bursts while others smoldered. But outside her office window, things were the same as they had always been, so she worked on.

Here and there signs of something different began to emerge: face masks, empty shelves, closed businesses. Information lapped in at her in waves, but she couldn't resolve it into a complete understanding, and she wondered if anyone, even among the governing voices, entirely grasped what was happening to the world.

Then the order came: stay home. Hospitals were to be overrun, supplies were low, and distance was the only thing that could slow it. So she sat in her apartment and watched the palm fronds dance softly and birds dip against the sky. She continued to work, and things were mostly the same.

A week became two, then three, and the silence around her grew. People began to filter off the street outside her window until only the drifting homeless remained. Days ebbed into nights with her at the window immersed in the ballet of the birds and the

trees. At night she'd watch the steadfast city lights twinkle on and reach out hopefully to caress faces before defeatedly being swallowed by the dark.

Weeks became months and she stayed in her apartment while stillness settled like ash. She knew that somewhere there was bustle, movement. Somewhere the fires were still burning and people were fighting them, but around her the world stood still. She stopped getting dressed in the morning and withdrew from the news. Friends and loved ones grew complacent in isolation as life crystalized into discrete moments from which they couldn't escape. The chair next to the window sagged and grew thin under her body, and in the stillness she sensed that the constants were slipping away.

Then one night in summer a wind began. It started up from the West and drew turbulent eddies across the sky. It penetrated her brain and agitated her mind such that she could almost see her thoughts turning end-over-end like the coils of a snake. Their repetitive hypnotism lulled her, freed her from active cognition, and she found that by standing among the blowing trees she was temporarily released from herself. For three days she idled aimlessly, unable or unwilling to find direction amidst the gusts.

On the morning that they ended, she awoke early, bathed, and put on a silk dress. She smoothed her hair and tinted her lips the color of poppies. From the small apartment

she stepped onto a clear street that mirrored her freshly scrubbed mind, and aimed her footsteps towards a fixed spot of blue water. She was shaded from the early morning sun by eucalyptus and oak, and in the silence no leaves rustled, and no animals cackled out to each other from the bushes. She reveled in that stillness, so deep that her hem forgot to partner her steps.

Her heels hit a metronomic beat to drive her, passing bushes with leaves of lacquer and flowers without fragrance. She stopped to stretch up and disturb a palm frond's rest and watched it sway like a watch on a chain, back and forth, with a weight magnified in the calm. She continued on. She saw no one as she walked and sensed that she too was invisible as she moved through this new world free of constants to frame her in place.

Suddenly she stopped at a crossing where a cat was cutting a seam across the asphalt ahead, dragging with it the edges of the stillness through which the city broke free. Families released from their houses joined her in procession to the sea, the men in soft linen suits and the women in dresses like petals of bougainvillea, all rippling in a gentle breeze. The children were clean and fell in step with their parents, little hands nestled in firm grips and even the leashes pulled in parallel to the water as the dogs swayed in time.

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**SHE IMAGINED THEM  
ALL AS CELLS OF A  
MUCH LARGER BEING,  
SIGNALING SILENTLY  
TO FORM THE WHOLE.**

---

Again, she felt lulled. The stillness had given way to movement, and in the movement there was synchrony. She imagined them all as cells of a much larger being, signaling silently to form the whole.

At the water's edge they billowed out blankets, unfolded chairs, opened baskets. Small rumbles of conversation broke out along the shore and grew into a baseline hum. The children began running, chasing each other in dips and furls, mirroring the seabirds above. She heard laughter, and as the sun grew brighter, she became aware of the feel of the sand under her toes. She dug them down to feel each grain impress itself upon her skin, reshaping the texture of the world.

■ CATERINA PRIZIO

Caterina is a medical student at CUSOM.

## IN THE BEGINNING

When I arrive, there aren't any carts. No baskets either. I wait for a few minutes thinking someone will walk out and hand me theirs. No one does though. People are walking around the store with their groceries piled in their arms like cartoon characters. A worker eventually pulls up with a long line of carts. I grab one from the end and thank her. I wipe down the handle with a Lysol wipe at a small sanitary station I have never noticed before. I shouldn't touch any other portion of the cart, I think.

I plan to buy my usual groceries, just things I need for the week—supplies for a quinoa salad that will be easy for me to grab in the morning on my way in to work, ingredients for chili and a new recipe I want to try. It's impossible though to get everything on the list. There's no chicken. Anywhere. There are still canned goods, though, which I didn't really expect. I grab the three different beans I need for my chili and place them in the cart. Further down the aisle an entire three feet of shelving is empty. It's the pasta section. Only three boxes of orzo remain. I wasn't planning on buying pasta but the emptiness of the shelf makes me feel as if it would be a good idea. I grab one of the boxes of orzo.

Maneuvering through the aisles is tough. People have a desperate look in their eyes. They reach for boxes and cans as if they will disappear if they don't get there quick enough. It's partially true. One couple, who

seems to follow me up and down every aisle, argue about their potential purchases.

"We don't need soup," the man states.

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### **"BUT WHAT IF WE'RE IN OUR HOUSE FOR LONGER THAN WE THINK?"**

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"But what if we're in our house for longer than we think," the woman answers back. She's in leggings and an oversized sweater. They look as if they strolled in here on accident. Maybe they drove by the parking lot and saw how full it was and decided that needed to stock up on some canned goods after all.

I soak in the energy around me. My heart begins to pick up pace. My eyes dart around the store. Stay calm, I tell myself. I'm just here for my weekly grocery shopping.

At the register, the man behind me tries to be helpful. He pushes the food further up in my cart so I don't have to reach so far back. Don't do that, I think. Now whatever germs were on his gloves are on my food and will be on my own hands when I place the food on the conveyor belt. I smile at him and don't say a word.

The woman at the register is wearing latex gloves. She rings me up.



“This is crazy,” I comment to her.

“It’s busier now than it is at the holidays,” she says.

I slide my credit card into the slot and key my pin in. Each button, I think, could be swimming with coronavirus. This is what it’s like to be a germaphobe. I have never in my life thought this way. I can imagine now being a mother, afraid of everything your child touches—the monkey bars at the playground, the toys at the doctor’s office, the goldfish they pick up from the floor and then shove into their mouth. Everything around me is a potential home for this invisible beast.

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### **IT IS THE WORKERS IN THE GROCERY STORE WHO ARE SEEING THIS PANDEMIC**

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“Stay sane,” I tell the cashier as I grab my bags from the counter. She nods and I thank her.

It is the workers in the grocery store who are seeing this pandemic, I think, not the healthcare workers. In the past week we have not seen a single case or tested anyone. The grocery stores though have liquidated their supplies and their cashiers’ fingers have gone numb from so many transactions. It is these cashiers who work

at King Soopers and Safeway, the clerks who unload the trucks at Costco and Sam’s Club, and the ones who refill the shelves at Target and Walmart who are on the other frontline of this crisis.

I walk out of the store, passing my cart off to the next person who walks through the door. From their somewhat labored breathing I can tell that they have walked around the parking lot, wondering exactly how and where they are going to find a cart. “Here,” I say to them as I pass it off. They don’t touch the handle but push it with their foot to the station with the Lysol wipes.

■ **BRENNA CAMERON**

Brenna is a fourth year medical student at CU who will be going into pediatrics.

## IN THE TOWER

Hours before the vernal equinox and  
Fat wet flakes confetti our patio furniture,  
Still free to wander where they want,  
When they want. To their dampening quiet,  
I wash dishes, fold laundry, practice yoga.

I try to forget that I cannot leave but  
Each minute falls just as heavy as the  
Mounting drifts outside.  
Miles away, my lover is wrapped in  
Dwindling paper and plastic, doing

A job that just days ago didn't feel  
So dangerous. That was the old world.  
In the new world, each speck he carries  
Home is an assault on our imagined  
Future. I discard everything but this moment

And set up a decontamination zone in  
The garage. Through the television screen,  
The slow-breathing yoga instructor says  
To take this calm and carry it forward, let it  
Permeate whatever real-world tasks remain.

But what if the only task left is to worry?  
I worry about the slick snowy roads  
I worry about the open-armed hospitals  
I worry about the man I love, the man  
I plan to marry, the man whose children

I ache to raise. I worry he will leave me  
Without wanting to. I breathe through my nose  
But it does not make a difference. I wait  
Like Rapunzel for his arrival. Once, I, too,  
Carried the sword, but now I find myself

Stripped and naked, unable to help him  
Defend the kingdom. Tomorrow, the snow  
Will rest still and clean; no one to dirty it,  
No one to scold it for arriving on the first day  
Of spring. Tomorrow, maybe, I will find tasks

Beyond worry. But not today.  
Today, I braid my hair into a long rope.  
Strand by strand, I try to pull him home.

### ■ ALLIE GIPS

Allie Gips is an assistant professor in Emergency Medicine and Palliative Care at the University of Colorado. She is a proud native Mainer who loves spending time outside, and, when she's inside, hanging out with her cat, Tatum.

## IN THE TIME OF CORONA

The last time I had seen him he looked dreadful. That was in the earliest days of the darkening that was this pandemic. He was on chemotherapy for metastatic carcinoma and he had extensive nonhealing intertriginous wounds approaching chronicity. Lying on the gurney for the examination he looked ashen, and his affect was depressed. His wife, his constant companion, sat in a chair in a corner of the exam room. Cancer was beating him, and the chemotherapeutic mercenaries that had been summoned as his allies in the fight against the cancer seemed to be inflicting as much collateral damage on him as intentional damage on his disease. We had treated him with topical antimicrobial dressings and measures to control moisture in the wounds, had educated him regarding the deleterious effects of chemotherapy on wound healing, and had counseled him on the importance of adequate nutrition in wound healing; all to little avail, it seemed, as his wounds refused to respond.

Today was different. I hadn't seen him in two weeks, having spaced his visits out in order to minimize his exposure to the health care system and with it to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Today he appeared transformed. His wounds were all but healed. He was rosy in complexion and enlivened in spirit; if human eyes were capable of perceiving chi or the life force, I have no doubt that I would have seen it

emanating from him today like the sun's corona during a solar eclipse; and yet, there was something wrong, something missing. It took me a moment to realize that he was alone today.

"Where's your wife?" I asked him.

---

### AS A NON PATIENT, SHE HAD BEEN FORCED TO WAIT IN THEIR CAR BY THE SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

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The smile on his face faded just a bit. "She's outside in the car." As a non-patient, she had been forced to wait in their car by the social distancing measures implemented by society and the hospital.

"Of course," I said. "I'm sorry about that . . . but, on a positive note, you look great!"

"The cancer doctor held my chemo for a few weeks to give the wounds a chance to heal," he reported, smiling.

"Ah . . . When do you see him again?" I asked. "Next week. To restart the chemo."

I nodded silently. "How do feel about that?" "What choice do I have?" he asked, looking me in the eye.

His was a Hobson's choice, in which only one thing was being offered, and therefore he discerned "no choice at all." But was that right? Faced with a Hobson's scenario, the offeree must still choose between accepting and rejecting the offer. It's only really "no choice at all" if the benefits of accepting the thing offered so obviously and thoroughly eclipse the benefits of refusing such that no reasonable person would refuse. Was that the case here? Standing in the shoes of neither the patient nor his oncologist, I chose again to simply nod, silently. I'm getting good at that, I thought.

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### **BUT DID IT'S BENEFITS SO OBVIOUSLY EXCEED ITS COSTS?**

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And what of the rest of us, I wondered, faced with the COVID-19 pandemic? Social distancing was our Hobson's choice, wasn't it? But did its benefits so obviously exceed its costs as to render the choice a non-choice? Might we—as a collective—have reasonably chosen another path, one less solitary, more communal, more human? I thought of the dying words of Kuno in E.M.

Forster's story *The Machine Stops*: "I am dying—but we touch, we talk, not through the Machine." Was it medical blasphemy to even harbor such a thought, let alone give voice to it?

The devil, I supposed, is in the details, as to both cancer chemotherapy and COVID-19 confinement.

We exchanged farewells, until we should meet again two weeks hence, and bumped elbows in the process.

■ **FREDERICK PAOLA**

Frederick Paola is a physician-attorney. He and his wife divide their time between Milan, Italy, and Naples, Florida.

## IN WHICH I ENVY A POT-BELLIED PIG

The pig  
on a leash  
in the yard  
that I pass  
munches grass,  
in contentment  
it seems.

I see the pig daily  
on my walk  
(the only time  
I venture out),  
mostly napping  
in the shade,  
unruffled by  
the memes.

Unperturbed and  
unaware,  
no hostage to  
the HEADLINES  
there,  
the pig sleeps well,  
the pig sleeps on,  
with no  
pandemic  
dreams.

■ JOANNE GILBERT

Joanne Gilbert is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Communication Emerita at Alma College and author of *Performing Marginality*.

## independence day

i woke this morning  
determined to  
celebrate truth  
birthed  
from expropriation

retrospect relics  
cultivated in song  
and pomp

i yearned  
to grasp explication  
from spirit  
fortitude  
forgiveness

i looked about  
for testaments

truth  
it turns out  
is everywhere  
more resolute  
than roots  
veiled beneath the Juniper trees

■ **JAMES E. CARTER, JR**

James E. Carter, Jr, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director of Service-Learning at Anschutz School of Medicine, is a cardiovascular functional medicine educator with vascular medicine and wound care clinics.

## JUNE BUBBLE

Maeve and I clinked together glasses of Mike's Hard  
sweating with firefly droplets  
so cold our hands wanted to drop them,  
on the creaking porch swing in her neighbor John's backyard  
that no one ever used. She was my best friend,  
keeping my clumsy toes alert to the rusty nails of life,  
she was the rope keeping my boat from  
tugging away from the dock.

I hiked my skirt up so high  
my butt got splinters, the soft flesh of the moon  
lighting up my badly shaven thighs.  
The night was quiet and cool and open.  
The night was anything we wanted it to be.  
The night was John mumbling and strumming  
badly-hewn chords on his thrift shop guitar,  
while Maeve and I inhibited the absurd in-between of high school and college,  
our elbows giggle-angling into each other's hip rolls  
so we felt the sting of each other's laughter,  
the time ticking down.

After the 4th Beatles song,  
we toddled through the back door  
to cracked linoleum smelling of unswept crumbs and orange peels.  
We pretended to forget how to boil water  
and how to pour tortellini - meaty rinds and hopeful centers  
into the swaying pot, and instead,  
let the pasta pieces and all the worries we'd hung from the vaulted ceiling  
down past the crayon drawings taped to the fridge,  
past the drawer where Maeve's parents still kept baby teeth carefully packed away in Ziplocs  
to settle like dust motes on the kitchen floor,  
pretended it was easy to banish a nostalgia  
we could not yet name.

■ **PRIYA KRISHNAN**

Priya is a 2020 CUSOM grad. She is a surgery resident in Portland and loves music and the mountains.



## KISSING IS THE BEST VECTOR OF TRANSMISSION

some things do not stop at the end of the world  
even if the restaurants are bare  
and my fridge is empty too

some small things live in between the puny pulse  
like the fact that i still love her  
even if there is quiet in her deep, open heart now  
even if the light slumps idle in my room  
stuck trying to clean my bones and floorboards

the big things too  
they are continuing to crawl  
like how the earth splinters with old wounds  
from the last failed apocalypse  
like how there is odd comfort in blindly knowing  
that we are all in the same situation now  
terrorized by the minute misery of a virus  
no matter our lives before  
or after when you said  
that i was wrong

we are not the world  
we do not have a way for it  
so that it cannot be lost  
so that we can be all of all

some things, you said, stop  
they end  
even if they are just starting to be  
the beginning of the world

### ■ KACPER NIBURSKI

Kacper Niburski is a fourth year medical student at McGill, a wanna-be writer, and a mediocre dancer. Find his work in the JAMA, BMJ, and at his Instagram: [\\_kenkan](#).

## LATER

Past my vantage  
the wind chattered good-bye  
I did not feel bad  
because of tomorrow  
or the day after  
or next month

I knew it would call me back

I closed the shutters  
after one last glimpse  
of two Smith's longspurs  
golden breasts shimmering  
sprung with wings glistening  
in gleeful harmonious flight  
distracted from their nest

I turned away from majesty because of tomorrow

The sun bright and seductive  
displaced the cold night glare  
pierced a reminder on my shoulder  
as a I shrugged off procrastination

Awakened  
by sadness so real I could feel my heart squeeze  
memories seared past my fingertips  
gripped raw with silence

I thought you would call me back  
tomorrow  
or the day after  
or next month

I was sure you would call me back

### ■ JAMES E. CARTER, JR

James E. Carter, Jr, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director of Service-Learning at Anschutz School of Medicine, is a cardiovascular functional medicine educator with vascular medicine and wound care clinics.

## LEARNING TO SLOW DOWN

I am learning to slow down.

For many of us in medical school, this interruption has been described to us as an “opportunity” – An opportunity to prove ourselves. To somehow prove that we are worthy of being doctors. To prove that we are resilient and flexible, yet productive. “What did you do during the COVID-19 Pandemic?” A question we will all have to answer. Haven’t I spent my whole life proving myself?

I am learning to slow down.

They’re right. I will never have an “opportunity” like this again. The opportunity to research, study, write, or volunteer. I will also never have time like this for myself, for my partner, for my family. Time to go for “coffee walks” around the park. To take a 3- hour drive through the mountains. On a Monday afternoon, no less. To watch Aladdin at 8 am, to make a huge breakfast. Don’t worry though, I am still making a daily schedule in excel. Blue is the new color for breakfast. Maybe I should change it to yellow. That feels more appropriate.

I am learning . . .

I am learning that we are so focused on being productive, but only in its most strict definition. Is it not productive to slow down? To appreciate the leaves growing? To watch the grass grow? To revisit old hobbies that used to define us?

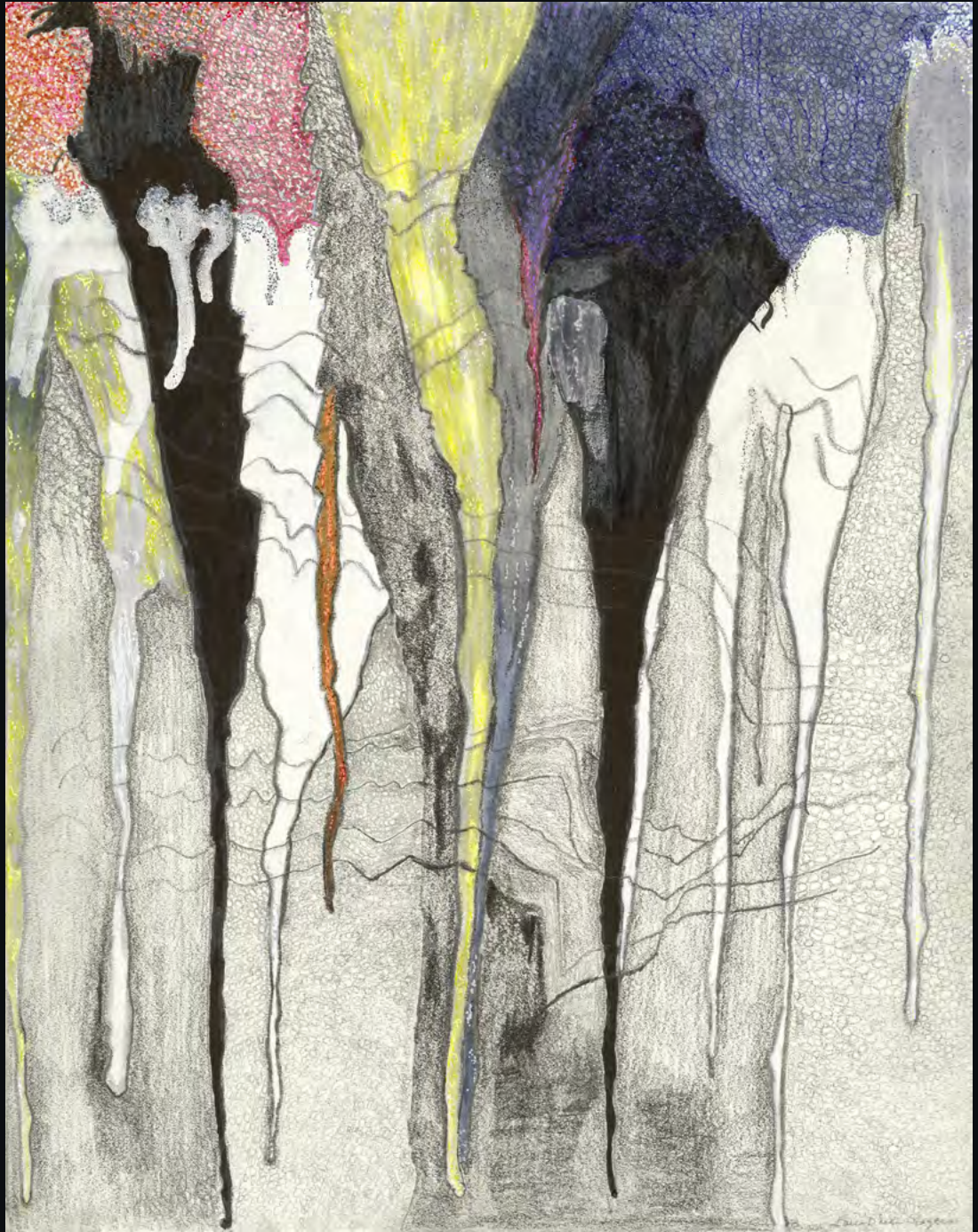
I am learning to slow down. I am learning to appreciate my time.  
I am learning to redefine what it means to be productive.

I am learning.

### ■ MADELINE PATON

Madeline grew up throughout the southwest and attended CU–Boulder. She enjoys horseback riding, skiing, and tacos.

## LIFE AND DEATH IN THE BALANCE



### ■ LAURA PHELPS ROGERS

Laura has a Bachelor of Fine Art in Sculpture from the University of Colorado with post graduate work at Otis College. She has had 14 solo shows and exhibits widely. Her work can be seen at foolPRooft contemporary art and through the collective Artnauts.



## LIVING ROOM VACATION



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■ **MORGAN QUIST SOOY**

Morgan Quist Sooy is a full-time nurse and lifetime artist who finds the most joy in being outside.



## LOVE AND ETHICS

Deciding life or death  
A place no one wants to be  
Politics, statistics, diagnostics,  
What about equity?

Celebrities and sports stars  
Testing and triage awaits  
Homeless, immigrant, uninsured  
Left to your own fates

How does one measure love  
Or years of life to gain  
Social distancing we all accept  
But social determinants remain

Transportation, housing, family support,  
Barriers to access care  
Include those with small voices  
When deciding what is fair

Yes to health workers and first responders  
The janitors and garbagemen too  
Shower extra kindness, love, respect, support  
Next they might just take care of YOU

### ■ CHAUNCEY CARROLL

Chauncey is a Clinic Supervisor at Centura Health and will graduate in May with an MPH in Leadership & Public Health Practice.

## LOVE ENDURES



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### ■ MARK EARNEST

Mark Earnest is a Professor of Medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine. He is an avid photographer, an enthusiastic husband, a full-service father of two teenagers, a back country skier, a weekend cook, and a closeted guitarist.

# MORAL INJURY

How did we get  
from  
survival of the fittest  
to  
survival of the richest?

When did we leave  
house-calls  
for patient satisfaction  
robo-calls?

Where will we find  
us  
when we look back at  
them?

Apparently:  
Do no harm,  
Autonomy,  
Beneficence.

*Only if you have insurance.*

So how, when, and where did we  
leave Justice?

■ **SNEHA SHAH**

Sneha is an Internal Medicine chief resident & a writing enthusiast. Always trying. Always changing.



## MY DAD AND THE NURSING HOME

Today, he's 95. He's enjoyed cake, ice cream and chocolate all day. He joined in on "Happy Birthday," rather bemusedly victorious at reaching such an age. Just a few months ago, we worried that he wouldn't last another week. Now, he is thriving.

### HE ALWAYS KNOWS US AND ALWAYS REMEMBERS HIS HARMONICA

We know now that his dementia is here to stay, but so far, it's mild. He always knows us and always remembers his harmonica, handy in his shirt pocket. The others in the nursing home smile at him, glad for any type of entertainment, even when it's a ditty like "Old MacDonald" or "Three Blind Mice." On this day, I manage to get him to play "Red River Valley," my favorite, and my eyes mist over, both from the song and from seeing him play it. I marvel that I actually think of him now as cute and sweet, and that I truly enjoy kissing and hugging him.

You see, I never kissed my dad, or at least I didn't for many, many years. I even found it difficult to touch him. I often found myself irritated and frustrated with his slow way of spreading out words, his often judgmental tone, and his generally negative attitude, along with the \_\_\_\_\_. It'd

been that way between us for years, and that's how I believed it would remain.

And yet, my first word as a bobbling baby had been his name, or a version of it, "Eo" for Leo. My mother tells me I would jump delightedly in my crib when he'd return from work. What happened over the years is complicated, twisted with teenage angst, work and money problems, moves and job changes, and the turbulent confusion of changing from a girl to a woman. Somehow, my feelings for "Eo" had become confusing and complicated. I was very close, and open, with my mother, but rarely approached my dad.

But I still have letters from him---long letters--- in which he tried to apologize or explain himself after a tiff, or tried to ease some disagreement I was having at the time with my mom or brother. Although he was not so great at expressing himself in person, his letters show intense feeling, wisdom, caring and compassion.

I'm now 51, the mother of three teens myself, approaching the "empty nest" stage of my life. Last spring, my dad's falls became too frequent and too frightening for my 81-year-old mom to handle. He had had short, temporary stays in nursing homes every now and then, but it was decided finally that he really did need to move, probably forever, to a home. If not, my mom's health would also deteriorate.



At first, I visited my dad frequently, but out of compulsion, guilt, a need to “do the right thing.” And then, slowly, I found myself enjoying my time with him -- not always, but more often than not. Dad is so pleased to see me, and he tells me stories about the war, about his childhood, about his parents, whom I never knew. He can be quite witty and humorous. There are times when he talks the end growing near, and many times when he repeats himself incessantly with lectures about the “inventive” new schemes he has created for us to “hit the big time” at last. Sometimes he fantasizes about his roommate having “lady friends” visiting secretly at night, or he imagines that someone has replaced his wheelchair with a smaller one. He obsesses over the inequities and peculiarities of the English language, wondering why but sound different, for example.

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## **FOR US, THE TIME IN THE NURSING HOME HAS BEEN A BLESSING**

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Through all this, I realized that for us, the time in the nursing home has been a blessing. I no longer feel embarrassed shy, stiff, or distant with Dad. I feel close to him. In the nursing home, with no distractions and all the time in the world, my dad thinks, and talks and shares, in a way he never did before. Even he says that although the home is “worse than the German POW camp: he was in for a short while during World War II, this is still the best time of his life. “I finally have time to think,” Dad says. And I finally have the space, time and ability to love him.

■ **IRENE THOMAS**

Irene Middleman Thomas is a freelance journalist living in Loveland, Colorado. She thinks of her father often and wishes that she had asked him more about his life while he was still alive.

## NEW NORMAL AT CHERRY CREEK STATE PARK



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### ■ DAVID M. WEIL

David M. Weil manages operations and educational technology for the Center for Bioethics and Humanities. He enjoys biking, hiking, camping, snowshoeing, paddling, and is an avid fiction reader.

## Nightanddayanddaysandnights

Last night's dreams were flying dreams.  
That is a good thing, relief from jumbled  
dreams of chaos that embed my sleep  
these past nights of strange days.

My phone bleats or blurts or whatever  
it does to alert me to something or nothing.  
Today it is something, something good:  
my daughter, an ER doc, sends me pictures,  
enthraling scenes on back country skis,  
she, having skinned above the sullen clouds  
blanketing the world of people and their woes  
to a realm of ice cream peaks floating on  
a cotton candy sea.

Day twelve for her, her penance for having flown  
from another state where ERs are full to bursting,  
whose bustling staff all sport darkling half-moons  
in the soft, swollen skin beneath eyes burdened  
by the day, the night, the day before, and one,  
two, three intubations too many, PPE too few.  
Two days from now she trades her skis  
for scrubs, girds for a night shift full of  
wee hours that are too few and too many,  
strives to part the clouds for the lucky ones.

I check my email hour after eager hour  
in wait of what a colleague has to say.  
Comments on a manuscript or grant,  
tracked changes, crossed out text,  
additions underlined in red — or is it blue  
in this latest iteration? I want to dive into  
the colors, revise, rewrite, cure cancer.  
The tree of knowledge bears the sweet fruit  
of purpose, however sparse the season's harvest,  
inciting dreams, the lightness of dreams that soar  
over mountains masked in snow; I savor unsullied air,  
turn my face to the wind, receive its bare caress.

■ STEVEN NORDEEN

Steven Nordeen is an Emeritus Professor and published poet who takes pleasure in the joys of language.



NOVEL



■ tess jones

tess jones is a painter whose art is inspired by quilts and the women who create them.

## OUR LIFE NOW

We are barreling forward, the counts rise into the thousands, the hundred thousands (the millions?). To the world before, we can't go back, and won't. Options are more limited now than they were before the pandemic, and those of us, most of us, who are stuck at home have the disappointing pleasure of boredom.

We yell at the screen. Cry over posts shared wide across the world. We fight. Our stress sets off a cascading argument as much a waterfall as the stained faucet in the tub. I lie in the bath with cool water on the bottom and a layer of warmth folds around me on top. It is a thermocline that reminds me of swimming in freshwater.

We hug. We wash our dog in the bathroom. We had to drug him with trazadone because he is so afraid of the bath. On hot summer days he'll stand in the kiddie pool. He learned to swim at a reservoir in the Springs, running in and out and in and out of the green as he chased sticks and barked, and we laughed. Something about the bathtub or the act of being washed scares the hell out of him. Maybe it's the noise our faucet makes, water thunders out and he curls into a heavy brindle ball on the floor. He knows how to use his size to his advantage. And finally he is in the tub, as pitiful as ever, and looking so much smaller. He accepts his fate. We accept our fate.

We apologize to each other. Exclaim how lucky we are. We talk about how we can't keep going like this.

We cook. Throw together what we can in our quarantine kitchen and it is delicious. There is no more chicken at the store so we cook pork and love it. There's no more pasta either, a real tragedy. The dishes pile up and the stale water collects in bowl upon plate upon bowl, red and brown, hoisin and ragu, are these from yesterday? Or the day before?

We zoom. Zoom around the house like our dog as a pup--he still zooms, frantically working and our anxiety rises like the fever of the world. We call our parents, friends, and family. We video chat for my cousin's birthday. She says that she has to get off because they have dinner plans and her brother tells her that's not a valid excuse anymore.

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## OUR MINDS WANDER AND PROGRESS IS SLOW

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We try to read. Our minds wander and progress is slow. One, two, three short stories a day. The thought of a novel is exhausting.



One of us starts a self-improvement book about habits, the other a 30-day yoga challenge.

No time like the present, after all.

We order take out, sushi, and one of us holds the hand sanitizer while the other holds the food. We arrive home and just as I put the miso in the microwave the power goes out with a click. We fill the plates in the dark and one of us decides to look for the circuit breaker. The power has never gone out before.

She is on her hands and knees in the dark looking for the switch while I eat. The neighbor's lights are on. It's too dark to see the squishy blob in my chopsticks and a whole mass of wasabi ends up on my tongue. I spit it into the soy sauce, mix it up, and keep eating.

The power comes back on, she's done it, and I have two pieces left when she sits down. I nibble at my remaining grains of rice and we share the last of the fish. I know she would have kept looking if she hadn't found it, and in every scenario I can think of I would have eaten before I jumped into help. I was just so hungry.

We spring a leak. Our landlord comes over in a mask and we show him the welt across the wall in our downstairs bathroom. It is bulging and he turns off the water. He has to come back tomorrow and figures it's from the tub upstairs. He shows us how to turn it back on and we do. We wash our hands.

We watch the snow. Then it is sunny, it rains, and snows again. Our dog's water freezes in the bowl outside. Not entirely frozen, just the top layer, the clear tap water sloshing below the surface. I dump the ice and water onto our lawn. The dog plays with the shards in the snow. Our lawn is pockmarked with brown spots and dead leaves from last fall, swept into forgotten corners. There's an old bird house that fell out of our tree. It leans against the side of the house, engulfed by dead leaves and tipped on its side. Green patches of grass are there too, peeking out from the melting snow.

I refill the bowl and our dog runs over. For some reason he always prefers the water outside.

■ NICK ARLAS

Dr. Nick Arlas is a family medicine resident in Denver, CO. He enjoys reading, writing, guitar, cooking and eating, and spending time with his wife and dog.

# PANDEMIC FALLOUT



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■ ZACHARY FENDER

Zach is a second year medical student at the University of Utah. He enjoys playing with his kids and going on walks.

## PANDEMIC FOR ONE

My edges fray daily and I feel undone  
My breathing comes shallow and my chest constricted  
I try to compensate and seek refuge in the mundane

My remedies are simple and homespun  
I am isolated and “local news at 6” addicted  
My edges fray daily and I feel undone

My rumination always returns me to a dry run  
Of my resources and what to do if I am afflicted  
I try to compensate and seek refuge in the mundane

I seek comfort from normality and find none  
Social Distancing and stay-at-home restricted  
My edges fray daily and I feel undone

Souls are spit into death like a Gatling gun  
The magnitude of the affect unprecedented  
My edges fray daily and I feel undone  
I try to compensate and seek refuge in the mundane

### ■ PAT BERRYHILL

Pat Berryhill is a creative writing program graduate of Salem College in Winston-Salem, NC, where she continues to sit on the council for the Center for Women Writers and is active in the writing and art communities.

## PANDEMIC KNITTING

The days have no beginning nor end  
not different from the ones before it.  
Sun and long walks sustain me.  
By nightfall, sadness and loneliness seep into the air, wrapping me like a worn quilt  
yet there is little comfort there.  
My hands, my hands they must move  
the need to move is greater than the stillness.  
Reaching down into the wooly softness that is a sweater in the making  
calmness reaches from my fingers with each click of the needles  
and spreads like an electrical current.  
All is right with my world...for another day.

■ **LISA DIAMOND**

Lisa Diamond, DNP, FNP-C, is an assistant professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Campus. She enjoys hiking, travel, reading, and knitting.





■ ARTURO GARCIA

Arturo Garcia is a full-time artist living in Colorado. You can visit his studio at 4040 Morrison Road, Denver, CO 80219. Learn more and see his works at [www.arturogarciafineart.com](http://www.arturogarciafineart.com)



## PATH TO NO-ONE



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■ **LYNDY BUSH**

A New Mexican oil painter that aims to capture human experience in relation to nature and objects.

## PHONE CALL

In the midst of the pages and work texts, I saw that I had missed another call from L. My mailbox had been intermittently full of postcards written in her looped hand, multicolored ink, with short messages of encouragement squeezed around stickers of cats and sushirolls. I don't know where she would've found a whole sheet of sushiroll stickers in rural Vermont, but there you have it. I finally call her this afternoon. She asks after my day, my work. Wishes me well. Listens to me complain about the tire shop and the ordeals of swapping out for summer tires like I do every spring. We talk about the pandemic. How Utah is opening up, but Vermonters are digging their foxholes a little deeper. She says, something unsettling happened. She shares the story.

I have a neighbor who lives across the road from me. She is my same demographic. A single woman in her early 60s, living alone, off a gravel road in the woods of Vermont. She is very pleasant and very quiet. Reserved. No family nearby, just like me. I often see her out working in her garden. I saw her Friday. She was fine. Police found her dead in her home Tuesday morning.

We speculate. Maybe COVID? But she's so isolated. Maybe a heart attack? Who knows? We speculate some more. Eventually we decide that maybe she reached nirvana. That walking the path in her garden over and over again, maybe her calm had reached such perfection, she ascended. Maybe she attained nirvana.

### ■ ROMANY REDMAN

Romany Redman, MD, is a global health fellow in Liberia with Last Mile Health and the HEAL Initiative.

# PREPARATIONS

On my way out  
lost in the replay loop of  
meetings and new protocols  
(why so contentious? aren't we "together," or is that just rhetoric? why am I on this  
committee again?)  
I find the door propped open and don't  
think it odd.

A murmur of chilly air that might otherwise go unnoticed  
cozies up to my face—  
a cruel reminder that I had to shave.

Without bushy whiskers, I face the wind.  
Is it purging my cheeks? Kinda seems like it.  
But, I don't feel any cleaner.

A surge of air greets me on the way back in  
the next morning.  
It's warmer, almost daring me to smile with clandestine  
hope.

How tall is the coming wave?  
Maybe it's already crested. I worry about others rolling in behind it.  
How many of us will be dragged  
out to sea?

## ■ NATHANIEL BROWN

Nathaniel is an anesthesiologist at RMR-VAMC.  
His interests include poetry, mountaineering, and choral music.

## RECKONING

Justice is measured,  
she has a plan.  
The king will not  
trade his crown,  
for scales.

So the things I hold  
dear, must shift.  
I will find a better way.  
Life must evolve out  
of every unholy  
of chaos.

I'll keep the pen,  
the paper. The dog,  
dog food, the inhaler.  
The will to make art.  
Kindness, I'll keep kindness  
close, along with love  
and hard cheese.

The heavy things, must  
burn into light. Self –conscious  
restraint, fancy clothes, vanity.  
Dreams deferred. These things  
must leave my home like  
smoke rising,

### ■ NICOLE RESTAURI

Nicole Restauri is a thoracic radiologist at CUSOM and has been writing poetry for as long as Nicole can remember as a way of making sense of the world.

## RESTRICTED FROM GIVING LIFE

When COVID first came into the US and people were becoming hospitalized, there was a national call for blood donations. People formed groups to go “Donate Life” and I was forced to sit home. The following is a 21-world poem meant to express my frustration at these archaic rules against gay men, such as myself, donating blood at a time when we are all looking for ways to help.

WE NEED BLOOD!

No, not yours.

Yours is dirty.

Help?

Abstain.

3 months.

You're a doctor?

Then you should know why.

### ■ JEAN-LUC BANKS

Jean-Luc Banks is a third-year medical student at UNC School of Medicine. He hopes to become a physician-writer.

## RUBBER PLANT



■ **LYNDY BUSH**

A New Mexican oil painter that aims to capture human experience in relation to nature and objects.



## SOCIAL DISTANCING



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■ LARA CANHAM

Lara is a faculty member and alumna of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program.

## SPRINGTIME

Daffodils rear their heads  
And tufts of grass birth themselves.  
In other times,  
We'd exit  
From hibernating holes.  
But now,  
We burrow deeper  
Into lost puzzle pieces  
And forgotten books of poetry.  
I've reacquainted myself  
With my legs,  
Ripe and bright  
From their first shave.

■ **BRENNA CAMERON**

Brenna is a fourth year medical student at CU who will be going into pediatrics.

## THE COMFY CHAIR

“Trash Can Willy’s Junk Removal Service,” said the voice on the other end of the line. “What do you want to move?”

“A desk, three waiting room chairs, two small tables,” I said. “And a large, blue easy chair.”

That’s my comfy chair I wanted to tell him. It’s where my psychotherapy patients sit. At least, that is where they sat until March when the pandemic forced me to leave my office behind.

Willy gave me his estimate, and I hung up, thinking back to the day I bought the chair. I found it in a used furniture store 11 years ago, when I was moving into my private practice office. Even then it had a slightly seedy look. It reminded me of the cast off furniture in many of the Cape Cod houses that we had rented through the years. Still, I liked its navy blue color, plush deep seat, and the corduroy upholstery. I tried it out before I bought it. When I lowered myself into the seat, I sunk down, put my head against its high back, and felt my shoulders relax. This was the right chair for me.

I named it the comfy chair six months after I bought it. One patient after another had walked into my office with a worried look on their face. Then they sat down and slid backwards, settling themselves into the chair. They exhaled. They smiled. “It is so comfortable,” they said to me. Of course, I knew what they meant. I had already taken several naps in the chair during my free hours, feeling like I was sitting in my grandmother’s lap when I woke up.

But now the chair poses a health risk to my patients. Unlike the plastic seat that my hairdresser will wipe down between customers, I can’t clean this upholstered chair. But the truth is that my entire office is unsafe for my patients. It is 10 by 12 feet, much too small for social distancing, and with only one window cross ventilation is impossible. It has taken me three months to accept the inevitable; I must move out of my office and continue doing psychotherapy on the phone and online, as I have been doing since the governor issued his stay at home order.

It is time to let go. One more loss in a season of losses so much greater than my own. Still, I’ll miss the chair. It held my patients close as they told me about their grief and worry, their questions about how to put their lives back together again. In my new world of virtual psychotherapy how can I ever replace it?

This week I will have to call Trash Can Willy to make an appointment to move the furniture out of my office. My heart will break, even though I know it’s for the best. Goodbye comfy chair.

### ■ ELLEN HOLTZMAN

Ellen Holtzman is a psychologist and a writer. Her previous essays have appeared in *Cognoscenti*, *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, *Mothers Always Write* and the anthology, *Same Time Next Week*.



## THE EMBERS

It was a blustery morning, sharp powdery peaks chiseling the cheekbone of organza sky. Hugging the rusty stretch of road by the winding Colorado River and through the telescoping tunnel, I was besieged by white. My car shuddered and swerved and slammed into the guardrail. Hands freed from the steering wheel, I saw the hood crumple into that rail. I remember gasping for air as my body curled around the wheel, feeling gut-punched, like I was back in second grade soccer and an accidental cleat to the belly had brought me to my knees. Then my head collided with the back of the seat and the roiling world went quiet.

“It’ll take a while for you to feel like yourself again,” the physician nodded later from behind her clipboard. My eyes swam with the ache of concentration. Her crisply laundered shirt, pressed khakis, the tongue depressors lined up like soldiers by the sink, the sharp square walls. I felt some great desperation, the urge to yelp like a dog on its first night in a new home. In monotone I had recalled the details of the accident. But I didn’t know how to describe that moment of breathlessness. Where I felt utterly powerless and utterly free.

I arrived at my next clinical rotation eventually, in a small town perched on the edge of the Western slope, where lovers kissed barefoot on the benches by the creek, where the twilight purpled

into inky black in the woods by the clinic like clockwork each evening, where some nights old men with stained teeth and uneven beards would gather in the basement of the local coffee shop to coax music from their ancient mahogany guitars. I was still digesting words slowly, but these languages I could understand. The orb of my brain, pummeled into confusion, was shaping and reshaping itself as I pressed my stethoscope against trundling hearts. As I listened to Mrs. Gilman’s stories of how she grew up wandering the pillowy hills flanking the town - she sketched out trails on the exam room paper. As I greedily popped the lid off the jar of homemade pickles Mr. Rafferty had given me after we had perused his blood sugar logs. As violin strings etched railroad tracks into the fleshy tips of my fingers in the basement of that coffee shop, alongside ukes and banjos and guitars and mandolins. As I rested my forehead against a mossy patch of river rock after a run that reduced my calves to taffy.

The second month, there was a fire. A steam train headed north had coughed up a blaze, and now billowy imitations of clouds crowded the sky. Everyone knew someone whose life had been overrun by the smoky plumes. I listened to the soot-speckled lungs of at least a dozen firefighters, palpated bellies as the wind carried greedy ash past the clinic windows in powdery ribbons. As I stressed her

sacroiliac joints, Mrs. Gilman told me, in between winces, that she was headed south to her daughter's home for a while. Mr. Rafferty still brought me something to share from his garden every clinic visit - cherries dripping syrup like the setting sun, and an apple I nearly broke a tooth on while standing barefoot on the rough, splintering planks of the deck one evening.

The next morning I startled awake while the sky was still the color of a bruised ocean. I sifted through my rumpled pile of clothes. Everything was covered with a thin veneer of dust. Even my skin felt ash-hewn.

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### **THERE'S A HILLSIDE WHERE I SWEAR WILDFLOWERS WERE INVENTED.**

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If you drive north a little ways out of town, there's a hillside where I swear wildflowers were invented. That's where I parked, my headlamp flickering in tune with the fireflies. I crammed a few shriveled slices of an orange I had found in my glove compartment into my mouth - it tasted

fossilized. I made my way across a clearing where the ground was too rocky for the stakes to sink their teeth into the grass. I danced from foot to foot to keep warm in the dawn chill, watching the light climb the tips of distant mountains as it journeyed to reach me. I propelled myself onto the singletrack that kissed the edges of the potholing highway.

From here, I could see where the fire had made its home, reducing, in its blinding embrace, the essence of these rooted and growing beings - to smoke and cinders and ash. To weightlessness. My feet made prayer wheels past the skeletal trees, through the heavy grey mist, down, down, paralleling the scarred asphalt, I found myself gulping, gasping for air, gut-punched, down, down, arms splayed, muscles thumping, hair tangling, down, down. Between footfalls I was free.

#### ■ PRIYA KRISHNAN

Priya is a 2020 CUSOM grad. She is a surgery resident in Portland and loves music and the mountains.

Breath in the time of COVID-19 has become a symbolic and nuanced concept - a representation of mindfulness and vitality, a means to connect with others despite physical isolation through speech or song, a precious resource that those who are healthy still have. In this piece, I recall healing from a TBI, exploring the concept of breath in recovering from an illness amidst a community facing disaster.



## THE EMPTY FARMHOUSE

they're gone now

we liked the enameled rockers  
on their weathering porch  
the hundreds of books  
in their "book room"  
a room that long ago  
was the summer kitchen

she'd rock and sing to him  
*summertime and the living is easy*

he died there  
drew his last labored breath  
disappeared in a hearse  
down the long driveway  
wisteria hedges blooming madly  
bluebirds in their fence post houses

strains of *your daddy's rich*  
drifting over the pastures

### ■ ANNETTE HOUSE

Annette House is a 1965 graduate of the University of Colorado School of Nursing, now retired after a 40 year career in nursing.

## THE GOOD TROUBLE

I am going to miss college. An unplanned end,  
A full stop. Not a semi colon; or a comma,  
Uplend like roots from a tree. I am going  
To miss BC. Three point seven five years of  
Boston College. A long intermission. Moments of going  
Out. Res on nice days. Confident tears and dancing on  
Blue water on a pho-senior sunrise. The million-dollar  
Stairs on the horizon, and the people the most. Running  
Into the people the most. I'm going to miss tailgating  
At the mods, cookouts, and I am going to miss you. Nine,  
One, one, and the emergency room. Eating late night  
food, but that's kind of cheesy. Eating at Arts Feast. Running  
Around together. Keeping everyone together and getting  
Lost. Together. Linden Lane. And getting lost  
Together. Men and women for others. Tethered together.  
Ceremonies and real love. Art, theatre, music, and life lessons,  
Drunk food and schemes, sharp and fine retreating to  
The res in the morning. Stokes lawn in the sun. Running on  
Empty, and smashing empties and bothering  
Time that never seemed to stop. Working like  
A rat in the gym and the rat. Unplanned dancing,  
Unplanned yelling, unplanned playing, unplanned everything.  
I loved seeing everybody I know but I feel like that's so typical.  
I loved getting into the good trouble and running.  
I loved Marathon Mondays, random run-ins, and crazy party  
Schemes. Dirty and beautiful. I miss feeling like I did at BC  
From two to three to four to five and nights with no expiration  
Dates. I miss the good days. I miss the good trouble. I miss  
The people. The people. The people.

■ ALEX O'CONNOR

Alex is a graduating senior at Boston College.

## THE PLAGUE

The plight of lovers passes  
In cars laden with corpses and flowers,  
Sweating and walking together, wheezing,  
Shyly coughing, smiling like the wine will  
Change tomorrow when new viruses arrive.

Our cities are sweltering in fluids,  
Rouxes of garbage, blood and noise.  
Gunshots clatter and we long for certain sounds—  
Crying, the pounding heat of a troubled heart,  
A silent stillness on empty gray-tagged streets.

Ambulance bells harbor empty grief  
And the mounting toll of death,  
Of theater bowing gracefully into conversation.  
And we fight for what's outside our bodies—  
Robust constitutions and emotional wastelands,

Pale faces with robust cheeks, sanitary sanity,  
Fire-plague odors, the fancy of freedom and  
The power, strength and horror of the law.  
We wage world war and guarantee concern,  
Invite disease and agony, frequent the zoo and

Torment children in cages of importance.  
Courage wanes and fear grips the cage,  
Puts down clean paper, feeds the bird,  
Pours water, slams the door  
And drowns the fowl.

I hear laughter as a knife slowly bends,  
Penetrating bowel, leaking sepsis, twists  
And mixes steel and blood and dirt  
And the plague claims our conscience—  
Conceit alive with deceit,

Knotted laces on old shoes with tubercular  
Soles, thick muddy air, dry funerals,  
Scars and stains and sores.  
My brain has buboes and searches for words—  
Pits and pipes, cakes and houses,

Honorable death, humane passion, lawlessness,  
Futility and comedy and the end of suffering.  
A warm wave of foam caresses velvet in a loud sea splash,  
I am underwater, alone and wet, and I hear the muffled  
Sounds of an unheard whistle on a nighttime train.

My energy is lagging—  
Persistence and exhaustion, shallow breathing,  
And the words are lost in the sound of darkness  
And in the smell of rain and wind. Silence.  
Blind endurance ousts passion and the light is out.

### ■ ELMO FRICKMAN

Elmo Frickman is a clinical professor of family medicine who has taught students for 40 years.

## THE POEM

quieter than the silence i am  
in  
as though my soul always  
understood the language of repose  
as though i were gratitude  
and not this moment's servant  
as though time conspired  
with a separate time's time  
as though the noise of noise  
made no  
in this stanza  
as though i could only see  
from here  
from this bowl of roses  
from this i

■ **STEPHANIE JEAN**

Stephanie Jean is the winner of the BOMB Poetry Contest 2020 Judged by Simone White.

## THERE WOULD BE NO SUMMER

There would be no summer that year.  
No mountains, no trips,  
No swims at the beach.  
No ball games, no hot dogs,  
No days in the sun.

Empty parks, lonely trails.  
Playgrounds wrapped in yellow tape.  
Pools without children, and  
Diamonds missing men.  
Ice cream trucks searching in vain.

No, there would be no summer that year.

But what of the hot sun,  
Burning fierce overhead?  
The alpine flowers abloom,  
While the animals grazed,  
And those long afternoon shadows,  
Crickets chirping at night,  
And hot storms with their lightning,  
Still flashing so bright?

The new season arrived just as always,  
The spring had to yield.  
And yet, even so, and just to be clear . . .  
There would be no summer, that year.

### ■ DEREK NOLAND

Derek works for BHWP in the CU Psychiatry Dept. His interests include travel, playing sports, running marathons, reading, and exploring natural Colorado. Born in Maryland, he moved to Denver in 2016.



## TIMELINE OF A CHOICE

Anatomic scientists warn of the impending **Tomorrow**.<sup>1</sup>

Experts groupthink **Today** to sanction a blink.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Yesterday** doctors were imprisoned for their autonomy.<sup>4</sup>

Shadows tapping in a future where the past fills every possible present.<sup>5</sup>

1. Doomsday Clock, est 1947
2. Groupthink, Irving Janis
3. Blink, Malcom Gladwell
4. Nazi doctor trials
5. EFT Tapping, PTSD treatment

### ■ ALEXANDRA SOTIROS

Aly is a mom, wife, and medical student. She enjoys living in a certain ambivalence.

## TO ELLIS MARSALIS, JR. (1934-2020)

From the moment I couldn't breathe  
to the moment y'all could not  
y'all stood gazing  
at my face  
for notes of suffering  
or clot

D'y'all really think  
my metronome  
would keep up pace  
beepbeepbeepbop  
Reassuring  
Ode to Health  
but look  
Joy's got to have some pop

I was a pianist, I'd have explained  
Taught jazz before you could talk  
Connick  
Wynton  
Branford – heard 'em?  
How about my old friend Cannonball?

Y'all didn't know a man of music  
Uses hands to speak his pain, huh

(You'd have seen my fingers, honey,  
Learning progressions  
to impart)

Now some white coats close my story  
Bet a white brother will write my life  
But will my sons and grandkids' music  
get white knees to end the strife

I don't know

(But I am coming  
My Dolores  
darling wife)

■ ARNAUD ZIMMERN

Arnaud Zimmern is a postdoctoral fellow in English at the University of Notre Dame.

## TOGETHER AGAIN

I walk through the heavy door straining to open it fully. My hands chilled from the white foam pumped seconds before.

I've met the requirements: afebrile, no symptoms of illness, or recent travel. My left hand tightly grips the lightweight blue paper with elastic strings. Its purpose clear.

I look around, no longer recognizing anyone with their face's half covered-my own joining the array. Walking to the registration desk, I began to nervously state my purpose for entering.

"Hi, I'm here to volunteer," my high-pitched voice says.  
"Down this hallway. Go to the last door on the right."

My feet move on their own as if this moment is all they were made for. I don't look back at the door I just entered, I look forward. Onward to do my duty.

As I third year medical student, I could have no meaningful clinical tasks. My hospital rotations were canceled, and I was stuck in the house to think about the victims, the heroes, and the virus.

For the past year, I had been trained to run toward medical emergencies. But now, with my lack of a medical degree, I was nothing more than a spectator watching the news three times a day, hearing the death toll rise and rise. Knowing, I had to do something, anything to help.

After the brief training, I'm assigned to a room and my trainer makes sure I have all the necessary supplies. The CaviWipes and gloves sit on the other side of the room after being used to meticulously disinfect the desk, chair, and phone. The paper with a long list of names, numbers, and test results all vied for my attention.

One at a time, I call. Three voicemails later, I hear your voice.

After greeting you warmly, I explain the reason for my call.

"You recently were tested for COVID-19, and I am calling to inform you of your results."

In that moment, I never knew a statement could feel so heavy after exiting my mouth.

"You are negative for the virus."

You're surprised and thankful, but your next words leave me grappling wondering why I did not endure the nuisance of foggy glasses sooner. But knowing that the routine of this day would soon become familiar.

"Thank God, now I can visit my dying father."

### ■ ALICIA PUGH

Alicia Pugh is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Illinois at Chicago and enjoys volunteering in her free time.

## TOGETHER APART

The malleability of the human mind is exquisite. In just a few months, our minds have adapted to an entirely new mold — one that defies many of the truths we had previously accepted as permanent and ordinary. Something as simple as touch, for instance, has almost instantaneously evaporated from our everyday interpersonal vocabulary. Something at once so routine, now suddenly forbidden. Our minds have so quickly learned that daydreams are to be confined to the home, to the open field, to the vacant trail. The moment another human, a passing breath, an exposed surface breaches one's self imposed threshold of safety, the mind turns on, and stays on, until the threat erodes with distance and rubbing alcohol.

*In which direction can I breathe? Don't forget to disinfect the steering wheel.*

Public spaces, grocery stores, and pharmacies house collections of these activated minds — all unanimously and meticulously planning the very placement of their limbs in space, and retroactively mulling over the accrued risks of each tactile contact.

*Perhaps this peach will be what brings the virus into my home.  
Or will it be the can of chickpeas?*

Faces are no longer faces. They are eyes, and they are masks. Masks have become a form of expression, a way to suggest what the smile they are concealing might exude. Mouths are no longer mouths, they are weapons. The very breath that sustains us may also harbor the power to kill us. Our eyes, our only unadulterated connection to the outside world, are now tools. They measure distance, observe our material containers, and collect data on where other hands have been. But what is far beyond absorbing photons, they smile. They smile for our mouths that have lost the privilege. They pierce through the tension engendered by collective fear to remind us that we are still human, and that we still have the propensity to love one another. Our eyes protect us by bringing us together, while keeping us apart. A striking paradox that has become our new normal.

### ■ MIKA MINTZ

Mika Mintz is a third year medical student and psychiatrist-in-the-making at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

## TURN THE WORLD AROUND



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### ■ GAYLA ELLIOTT

Gayla Elliott is an art therapist at Marcus Institute for Brain Health. She loves art, writing, music, and the outdoors.

This acrylic painting with collage was created as a meditation about the impact the Corona Virus has on human consciousness. Lyrics by Harry Belafonte ("Turn the World Around") were added to the piece. The words offer a profound and upbeat message about how we can find meaning and begin the process of healing ourselves and our planet. Other symbolism in the painting addresses global warming, our human fears of illness and economic crisis, searching for hope, becoming centered, and focusing on the Buddhist concepts of acceptance and compassion.



## UNTIL IT'S OVER

Roland was fearless. He wasn't afraid of new places, wild animals, or strangers.

When he had a stroke on March 5, 2020—the day Colorado's first presumptive positive COVID 19 case was announced—he showed no fear, even though he couldn't walk or stand without his weaker left side giving out beneath him and his right plummeting after into gravity's course. At the hospital they said “vascular events complicated by stage III kidney disease,” “right forebrain or left cerebellum.” They told her to “wait at least a day” before “making any decisions.”

One COVID case became hundreds as alarmed businesses, institutions, and lawmakers scrambled to gain traction while strategic plans, sales quotas, and timelines for 2020 dissolved like casualties of Dali's *Persistence of Memory*. The initial jolts into action included long-winded justifications citing an “abundance of caution,” ramped up cleaning protocols and reassurances of continued normalcy despite a few “temporary” disruptions with “your safety” in mind. Surely this was nothing a few extra boxes of cart wipes couldn't fix. Yet submicroscopic particles had slipped into the United States, circulating undetected as Americans watched behind the sacred safety of their screens as people in far off countries wore masks, got sick and died. Then it happened in a Washington nursing home. Then New York. Then everywhere.

Suddenly there was a curve to be flattened, lives to be saved, and an increasingly urgent sense to forget everything that seemed to matter previously. It was time to find a mask, recalibrate normal, and hide away from the deadly biological intruder that not only changed lives but the way we think about life itself—an eerie and contentious reminder that humans cannot by default contain the natural world of which we have always been a part to conveniently fit all the aspirations and whims of our design—however beneficent or nefarious those may be.

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### THEY MET ON A ROOFTOP IN PITTSBURGH IN 2001

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They met on a rooftop in Pittsburgh in 2001. It took some doing to get her attention, but finally she noticed him—three stories up, waiting in the dark on a narrow ledge outside in the faint light from an attic living room window of what was once a grand Victorian mansion. She invited him in. He was dirty and judging by his nightly ransacking of the kitchen trash can, he had grown accustomed to a diet of street garbage. She left the windows open for weeks in case he had somewhere else to be and put up flyers in case someone else was looking for him. Lost Kitten: black, long hair. He didn't leave and no one called. She named him Roland after the Roland funny

cat guitar pedal because he seemed like a rock and roll kitten. He was home, his first.

And then they moved. First to the “crazy house”—another Pittsburgh mansion whose best days were long gone and never coming back—where Roland was the welcoming ambassador to the scruffy boys of the DIY van tour bands who were near permanent fixtures temporarily crashing in the living room after playing \$5 punk and hardcore shows. He became the house’s most unpopular DJ when he learned he could pick up an untethered stylus with his paw and arbitrarily drop it in the middle of whatever happened to be left on the turntable, creating loud unwelcome wake up soundtracks after very short nights. Black Sabbath at 7:00 am? Perhaps someone will realize it’s breakfast time.

They soon moved across the country, then back, then back again. Together they lived in 11 different places during Roland’s 19 years. Some of the places were full of drum kits and amps, and some had yards to roam in and neighbors’ enticing open garages which ensnared his liberty and led to nightmares about his demise by a speeding car or hungry mountain lion playing out in her head. Some places came with roommates, some had boyfriends and one, briefly, a husband. While some were small and dominated by books—first about cinema, then literature and teaching, then bioethics--others were expansive with stairs and an ever-expanding collection of artifacts: ice axes, crampons, climbing

shoes, skis, bikes, camping gear.

In Missoula, Montana they would walk around the northside late at night, when all the other neighborhood dogs and humans were asleep. Roland would run ahead on the sidewalk, tail high in the air, a seamless transition from Pittsburgh street kitten to confident Montana cat on the edge of the Rattlesnake Wilderness, unbothered by the calls of coyotes that echoed through the now familiar nights of starry skies and woodsmoke. They encountered big horn sheep at sunset at Badlands National Park and became outlaws together when she smuggled him into a string of dingy interstate motels—east to west, then west to east, then east to west again.

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### **SHORTLY AFTER THE STROKE, CU ANSCHUTZ SENT THE MEMO: COVID 19**

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At her third Colorado apartment in Denver, the vet said Roland needed daily subcutaneous fluid injections and twice daily medications to support his failing kidneys. He was 17. She took him with her to the mountains on a business trip to Aspen, packing up the needles and medications, hanging the electrolytes fluids and drip set from the hotel shower curtain rod—the accommodations a much appreciated upgrade from their earlier road trip days.

Shortly after the stroke, CU Anschutz sent the memo: COVID 19. Pack up your stuff. Have a great weekend and don't come back. As she sat at home cancelling everything she spent the last six months planning, she watched Roland try to stand up. Again and again his body collapsed. He kept trying. She carried him to his food and he ate. She put him in front of his water and he drank. When he didn't, she used a dropper. Her inbox filled with questions. When will it be rescheduled? When will the gallery be open again? What about the fall? She tried to find answers and make new plans with new dates. A new schedule for—after. For the fall. She researched pet cremation. Due to COVID 19, our farewell rooms and grieving chapel are closed. Please say goodbye to your beloved pet's body at home, pack it securely in two garbage bags, and call us when you are ready for your contactless curbside pickup. She wondered if veterinary crematoriums would become enlisted if the human ones became overwhelmed with COVID deaths. Would she end up borrowing a shovel and sneaking off with his body for a clandestine midnight burial in Cheesman Park? Uncertainty itself became the familiar.

When Roland returned to the vet for follow up, now a "contactless clinic," he had begun taking more and more wobbly steps on his own. He compensated for his feet sliding out from under him on the hardwood floors by taking wind up toy staccato steps and sticking to the carpet rugs she added to

the apartment where he could for better traction. He was eating and drinking again. The tech who hugged her just a few weeks ago came out gloved and masked to retrieve Roland's carrier left outside the office door like an abandoned shelter cat while she waited in the car. When the tech returned him to the sidewalk, now with a bottle of prednisolone mini melts resting on the blanket beside him, she could see the compassion and hope in her eyes above the mask before she turned and went inside. Roland was one of her favorites. Back home and on the steroid, Roland leaned his weak left side up against walls and furniture while she worked. During Zoom meetings, she listened for the soft thud of his body, thankful she could mute while she picked him up and put him back on his feet, grateful to hear him purr again in the space by her side that she knew would soon be vacant. His last home. He was not afraid.

Her inbox continued to fill with questions. When will it be rescheduled? When will we be back on campus? When will the world as we used to know it come back? *When it is safe. When it is time.*

■ MELEAH HIMBER

Meleah Himber is staff at the CU Center for Bioethics and Humanities.

# UNTITLED



■ **CARINA BAÑUELOS-HARRISON**

Carina Bañuelos-Harrison is a mother, artist, curator, social justice fighter, and Assistant Manager for the School of Botanical Art and Illustration at Denver Botanic Gardens.



## USNS COMFORT ICU



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### ■ THOMAS BOLSEGA

I am an Active Duty Intensive Care Unit nurse for the United States Navy.  
I am enrolled in the Veteran and Military Health Care MSN program.



## VIRAL SHEDDING

i do not wish to tell you  
that this is it  
all that is left  
when all is taken away

there is the sickness  
older than this sickness  
that can spread from a laugh or  
cough alike

there is the reminder in this absent evening  
it is a very courageous thing  
just to be and breathe

there is the fact that even here  
on the best of days  
where none of this virus could've happened  
where there is summer summoned by lemonade  
and i am still in your warm arms  
at least 50% remains terrible somewhere  
50% is terribly awful for someone  
for every child born, one dies  
for every love, a heartbreak

there is me knowing that even now  
there is  
a small possibility for us again  
and that is enough

there is the sun  
with no real choice  
with the colour of a dead channel  
rising through the morning haze to begin once more  
on these old, wet wounds

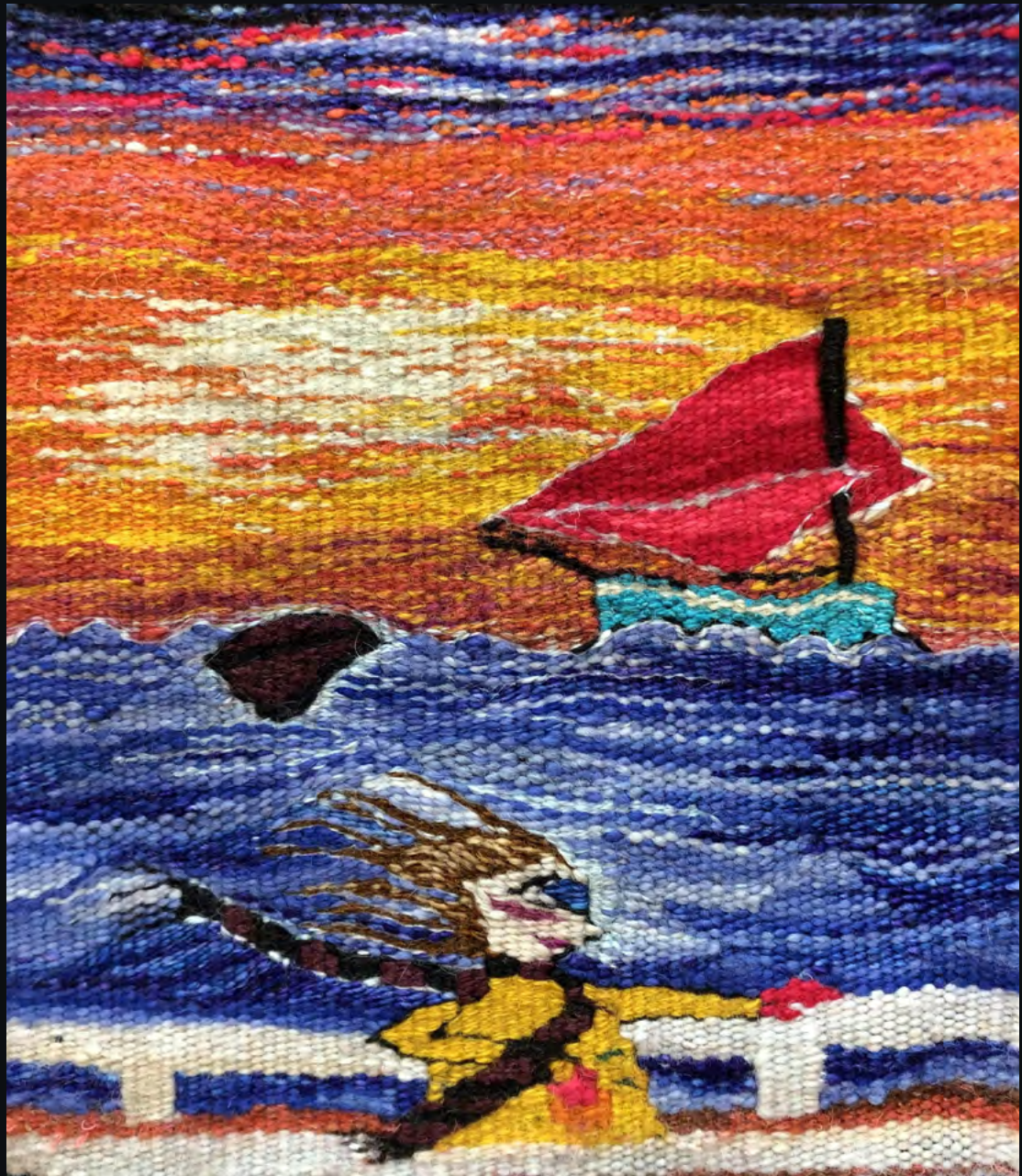
there is a feeling that time too  
might be accidental  
that all of this is just a bad story  
and the universe is not made of energy  
but the lack of it  
lack of trying and love and hope and happiness  
and you

there are all the things i have not yet said  
but will, i think,  
when you are there  
where i do not have to wish  
anymore

### ■ KACPER NIBURSKI

Kacper Niburski is a fourth year medical student at McGill, a wanna-be writer, and a mediocre dancer. Find his work in the JAMA, BMJ, and at his Instagram: [\\_kenkan](#).

## VISITS WITH OLD BLIGHTY 2020



### ■ GINA WIMBERLY-GARD

As a yarn artist hobbyist, I knit, crochet, felt, or weave. Using the colors and textures of yarn, stressful days can unwind. And hopefully I create something enjoyable.

# WAITING

Step. Away. From. The. News.

And into a world

Eerily normal

A whisper of hope for summertime

Warms the spring air

Bringing out runners in shorts

Sassy magpies chattering in trees

Healthcare workers exiting their workday

Walking home in their blue scrubs

Backpack slung over a shoulder, phone to ear

A forsythia blooms

A prophecy of snows to come

Daffodils nod in agreement

Discarded cigarette butts litter the ground

Where a smoker inhales

At the edge of the smoke-free campus

Sirens in the distance

No more than usual

YET

More people are walking

Stepping off the sidewalk as we pass

Pedestrians waiting for lights to change

Stand behind invisible lines on the sidewalk

The patios are empty of happy hour patrons

Along the restaurant mile of darkened buildings

And in the shadow of the sturdy hospital structure

Two empty white tents

Stand as sentinels by the emergency room doors

The news invades the unusual quiet

And the air is still

With the holding

Of our collective breath

■ **DEBORAH HELSER**

Debbie is a midwife, retired from clinical practice. She writes to make sense of a chaotic world.

## WE WILL SEE

We said this for years,  
shackled in cargo holds,  
awash in cotton,  
dying on fields of battle...  
We said this on June 19, 1865 and on May 25, 2020.

We said this during peonage, Grand Wizards, and Jim Crow.  
While statutes were erected to celebrate savagery, flags flown to intimidate citizenry,  
terrorists nurtured and grown, we said this.  
While Jesse, Joe, and Jackie were denied food and shelter,  
as black boys hung from trees like strange fruit,  
we said,  
this is the land of the free for you,  
not for me.

We stood with Tommie and John, transformed with Muhammad and Kareem,  
confronted with Mahmoud and Colin.  
We gathered en masse with Martin and Malcolm, overflowed town halls for  
Bobby and Huey, chanted and sang, preached and plead, with Jessie and Al.  
We demanded justice, with Thurgood and Andrew...  
though burnt with despair, chafed by frustration.

We said this for over 400 years,  
and now you pledge allegiance to empathy and action?  
Now you cry tears of consciousness?  
Now you beg for restraint?

We said this.

We kneeled for Amadou, Trayvon, Eric, Philando;  
for countless unpublicized souls for whom there is no video,  
no affirmation of truth.  
You were willfully immune to fairness and equity, lest self-evidence breach the sanctity of your prosperity,  
your schools, your hospitals, your courts, your boardrooms, your arenas, your voting booths...  
your privilege.

Time is up.

Rub away the shame of complicity.  
Focus on the task at hand.  
Do not remain muted and culpable.

You desire absolution for negligence,  
forgiveness for delayed reckoning.

We will see.

### ■ JAMES E. CARTER, JR

James E. Carter, Jr, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director of Service-Learning at Anschutz School of Medicine, is a cardiovascular functional medicine educator with vascular medicine and wound care clinics.

## WHAT IS THIS?

What is this? What is this feeling?

What is this? I thought as I watched groves of people walk in groups toward the popular trails near my house.

What is this? I thought as I saw posts of people hanging out with friends.

What could they possibly be celebrating?

What is this? I thought as I saw people playing cornhole outside a nearby restaurant.

Drinking beers, laughing, having fun. Touching.

What is this? Am I angry that I have taken this seriously, and they are not?

This is not supposed to be fun.

What is this? Am I disgusted that they are celebrating having time off work?

Meanwhile my friends are risking their lives, their family's lives, to care for those who are sick.

They are celebrating, as my friends don't know how feed their children.

What is this? Am I sad that they are so selfish or Am I sad that they don't understand?

Am I sad that my little sister is suffering the disappoint of not getting the chance win state in the 4X400 her senior year of high school while they act like it's a snow day? Why do they not feel what has been taken from her?

What is this? Am I scared that I may not have a home in two weeks?

What is this? I am so desperate to go back to 17-hour days on with my surgical oncology team.

Please, God I want to worry about a Shelf exam.

What is this? What is this feeling I have? How can I describe something I have never felt before?

### ■ MADELINE PATON

Madeline grew up throughout the southwest and attended CU-Boulder. She enjoys horseback riding, skiing, and tacos.



## WHEN YOU LOVE SOMEONE SO MUCH

you don't visit,  
keep your germs to yourself.  
Kindergartners were right —  
cooties are real and no, you can't see them.

You hope to live through this pandemic  
long enough to hug Poppop again,  
hope he stays healthy through Thanksgiving,  
that he's Passedover.

What keeps you from sleeping is the endlessness,  
that no one, not the authorities, not the politicians,  
not the doctors or nurses, not the epidemiologists,  
knows when we'll go back

to normal. When playgrounds weren't filled  
with ghosts, national parks were open,  
when you didn't hold your breath  
in the elevator, didn't have to

cross the street to avoid  
bumping into someone.  
What's become clear  
is who really runs

the world — grocery store workers, pharmacists,  
janitors. The ones we pay so poorly,  
the everyday people,  
the yous and mes.

■ **MARLENA CHERTOCK**

Marlena Chertock is a queer disabled poet, *OutWrite* Co-Chair, and sits on *Split This Rock's* Board.

## WHY WAIT



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### ■ DAVID SABIO

a really lucky kid who cares and shares  
born free, at times forgetting, eternally blessed  
sabio <3 :D

## WINGING IT



### ■ MEGHAN RALPH

Meghan Ralph (Department of Physiology and Biophysics) enjoys writing, painting, ceramics, and photography.

## WISHING YOU WELL IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

I'm sorry we are talking about this again & again  
except what else is there to talk about?

No, my parents don't have it yet,  
and yes, we have enough toilet paper,  
no, our sourdough hasn't yet started.

On a 70-degree day in early February,  
when I sat atop a mountain with a friend  
& said "soon this will all be different"  
I meant "soon, I will be pregnant"  
not "soon the world will come to a grinding halt"  
the day was warm enough to eat ice cream  
& walk in the woods, had I known then  
what I know now I would have never said  
"well I need to get home to my husband"  
precisely at five, we would have watched the sun set  
& talked about nothing like best friends do,  
until it was too dark to go on.

Last night I made a list of all my loved ones  
for writing "in the event that I should die" letters,  
each name fell off my pen like beads of gratitude  
dropping one by one, the list expanding far beyond  
what I could expect. I wonder which of you  
was the last person that I hugged &  
if we probably knew then hugging wasn't a great idea  
except how could we stop ourselves  
from one last final touch  
before touching was no longer allowed.

As I write your names  
I imagine you as points in a constellation  
connected by the opaque line of me  
(would you still be connected even if I died?)  
I want to call you each to say  
"you are essential to me"  
if only to hear it back  
and soften this universe  
in which my husband and I  
are still trying to plant new life  
like fanning embers of hope.

### ■ ALLI HARTLEY-KONG

Alli Hartley-Kong is a poet, playwright, and digital strategist based in northern NJ.  
Her work has been performed at theatres internationally and nationally.

## AFTERWORD

2020 was the year of discovery and loss. Layers of comfort stripped away, truths goaded us unabashedly with little warning. Many of us were forced to acknowledge our heretofore underappreciated fragility. In the not-so-distant past, complacency was effortless. We woke each day secure with the mundane, safe within the limits of our personal challenges. Later, as each breath washed away, our witness seemed at times unbearable. Our search within the rubbles of our freedom left us endangered by unseen terrors. Some were fearful of isolation. Some felt conspired against. We lost our sense of self, our compass, our loved ones. Adrift within this devastation, we discovered that our fragmented interconnectedness must be shared to be repaired. Buoyed by novel experiences, together we crafted moments into savored memories.

Bereft, our lives reimaged, we recast our fallacy, reframed our spirit, and reconnected with those we hold dear. We reaffirmed our core values and confronted our truths. We allowed light to filter through cracks of darkness. We constructed ways to sift through repositories of the human dynamic, rich with context, history, and perspective, and transformed attitudes and assumptions. We restructured our thirst for being into a new presence. As we continue to boldly restore, we must honor the sacrifices of courage, from frontline deliverance to lonely passages, and emerge sustained.

This is our mandate. It is up to us to flourish from this gradation. Our renewal will arrive gently, propelled by introspection, softened by waves of resilience. Repurposed and redirected, we can endure this pivot. Subtle in its favor, we may not fully cognize the bountiful arc of curvilinear growth.

Some pine for a return to normal. Others, with prescient positivity, embrace the limitless potential of novelty, viewing exploration into the unknown as a gift.

**SINCERELY,**

*James E. Carter, Jr*

James E. Carter, Jr, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director of Service-Learning at Anschutz School of Medicine, is a cardiovascular functional medicine educator with vascular medicine and wound care clinics.





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