



NETWORK
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Women *Writing History*
IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC



April Boyington Wall

Initially trained as a social worker and therapist, April moved into business consulting early in her career and taught graduate courses in management. She has just begun the journey of creative writing.

She lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband Richard Weisman.

COVID CHANGES

By April Boyington Wall

Princess Eileen is shocked about the changes in her husband during the pandemic.

In an interview last week the princess was quoted as follows:

There has been a lot in the news about some of the transformations that the lockdowns have caused. However I really wasn't prepared for what happened with my husband.

It all occurred very gradually. We were under stay-at-home orders for over a year and like everyone else, we didn't go out much or see anyone other than each other and our kids, so I didn't notice the gradual differences in him.

I think it began with changes to his skin, which I put down to not having the chance to be outside working in the garden or walking the children to school. Then I noticed that he wanted to spend more and more time by the water, especially in areas where there were lots of weeds. I just thought this was his interest in nature. His work-out routine changed as well. He started doing more and more squats which he said would help build up his quads, especially when he combined them with jumping jacks.

His attitude towards work was different too. He seemed to become more competitive with his coworkers and wanted to move up the corporate ladder. He talked constantly about leapfrogging.

Then his voice became different. It moved into a lower register and I noticed that he talked more and more in monosyllables, with short, low-pitched grunty sounds. So our communication took a real turn.

Our sex life, of course, was affected by all this too, especially his interest in waterplay, and his wanting me to dress up in filmy greenish outfits.

A while ago, he moved out of our bedroom and then finally confessed that he wanted to live outside and be close to his people. I'm afraid this has marked the end of our marriage, even though I understand that with the strain of the pandemic he would want to find comfort in familiar ways.

Who knew that after he changed from a frog into a prince, that the lockdowns would shake him up so much? I hope the same thing doesn't happen to our children. He occasionally hops by to visit them, but it's not the same. They miss him terribly and often say they want to join him. Obviously they share his DNA so I am worried that we may be facing some similar transformations ahead.

I am trying to cope as a single mother, but I would appreciate having a support group with people who understand the circumstances. Someone has recommended Tall Women Married to Giraffes, and another friend suggested Disappointed Princesses Anonymous. One of the children's teachers suggested a parents' group for trans children, but unfortunately, this is not the type of trans that affects us. So far none of these seem to be the right fit, but fortunately Meghan and Harry have started a Facebook group that I found very helpful.



Dianalee Velie is the Poet Laureate of Newbury, NH. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, and has a Master of Arts in Writing from Manhattanville College. She is the author of six books of poetry, *Glass House, First Edition, The Many Roads to Paradise, The Alchemy of Desire, Ever After, Italian Lesson*, and a collection of short stories, *Soul Proprietorship: Women in Search of Their Souls*. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, the New England Poetry Club, the International Women's Writing Guild, and the New Hampshire Poetry Society, and is the founder of the John Hay Poetry Society.

DOMESTICATION

By Dianalee Velie

My daughter-in-law thinks I've raised a gem:
her dear husband who loves to cook and clean,
my domestic skills an endearing emblem
of how I raised him. I smile, serene.

His laundry tasks are quite meticulous
and whites stay away from multi-color.
The bread is always perfect, ravenous
folks agree, whole grained and full of flavor.

My son, Mr. Wonderful, because of me?
Honestly, these traits I do not possess.
But I suspect the reason is simply
when he was eight, I now will confess,

I turned his white hockey stockings hot pink
and burned the bread as black as India ink.



Margaret Dubay Mikus is the author of five poetry collections. Her CD, *Full Blooming*, has selected short poems and 3 original songs. Margaret also created a personal writing guide using her popular poem, "I Am Willing." She was the 2013 Featured Illinois Author for *Willow Review*. Her poems, photographs, and essays have frequently appeared both online and in print, and her blog at www.FullBlooming.com includes 67 poem-videos.

PANDEMIC LESSONS

(Talking with Bekah)

By Margaret Dubay Mikus

It is possible
or even likely
we will get so swept up
in the wider world
rushing back that
we will forget to remember
the lessons we learned
in this enforced solitude
this required isolation
of the essence of nourishing
connection, what works
what doesn't. The importance
of discerning the truth
before forming an opinion
before taking any action
What we missed
what we didn't
about the way it was
before all this
shifted our perception
What can we do better
how we can be better
make more serving choices
be more fully conscious
protect the vulnerable
preserve and cherish
who and what we love
aware of what is unknown
our time here is short
all time is now



Penmah Johnson was born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1992. She's a creative who loves to write and has membership on freelancing platforms as an SEO content writer. When she isn't day-dreaming or writing, she's either with family and friends, cooking or soaking in nature, in all its forms.

GLOBAL PANDEMIC: THE NEEDED REDIRECTION

By Penmah Johnson

The day broke like every other day, pregnant with hopes and expectations. Like many others, I didn't know the magnitude of what was about to be.

In Lagos, Nigeria where I reside, the change was heralded by the dawn of March 27th, 2020. Before the close of the workday, the work from home phase was announced. Oh! I and many others welcomed the change that felt like a holiday at first, and an answered prayer. Now we can pay back all the sleep we owe our eyes and binge on our favorite shows, or so we thought.

What we were to experience instead, as women, was a test of our multitasking skills. Not only were we required to work from home, the expected output was higher. The home front was not left out, as many women had to juggle meal preps, meal time, keeping an eye on the kids, checking on the parents, monitoring groceries and supplies, and generally managing the home.

Due to the pandemic and the restrictions that came as a result of the widespread COVID-19 virus, it was difficult to have the cook and every other domestic staff around. As a result of the restrictions on movement, ordering food and eating out from our favorite restaurant was out of the picture. Thankfully I, like many other women, would not accept defeat, especially at the expense of our family's wellbeing. So, while we were in that Zoom meeting, smiling, donning blazers over our "supermom" t-shirts, the blazers not only covered the stain on the t-shirts, it also covered the chaos behind the scenes, as a result of our children being at home with little room to express their exuberance. For fun, we were on YouTube watching videos on how to make our own sauce, pizza, ice-cream, shawarma, bread, Edikaikong (vegetable) soup, Banga (oil palm) soup and even how to properly bleach and sanitize all surfaces.

As the days rolled by into weeks, there were jokes, and assumptions about the virus. Worthy mention were the conspiracy theories that made the rounds about the nature and reason for the pandemic. It was the most talked about and researched conversation on the Web. Over here, the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) website statistics were over the roof, as every click on the refresh button on our phones showed the numbers change right before our eyes. Depression and mental health became a point of concern. Some of us quickly turned to social media trends and fun challenges; anything that could distract our thoughts and make us happy for however short a period was welcomed and encouraged.

The streets of Lagos were deserted as the curfew was enforced; the few times I had the chance to be out, the air smelt differently and even lighter in the absence of all the pollutants. There was sanity on the streets, the quality of air got so much better, human interaction and social skills became appreciated, compassion and empathy were reignited in all our hearts but it had to take a pandemic to make it happen.

Personally, my love for nature was rekindled over the course of the pandemic as I had to leave the city for the country-home. For the first time in a long time, I saw seeds germinate and bud. I had the luxury to pause, and watch the earth yield her increase right before me. Such beauty! I took to fitness to make up for a lack of physical activity and I saw many other women do the same.

I have the pandemic to thank for the confidence it instilled in the hearts of many young people in my country. I guess having to face your own thoughts and alter-egos does have a way of shifting your mentality. In the wake of the pandemic, the youths in Nigeria took to the streets to protest against police brutality, rape and injustice and it was unlike any protest ever witnessed or experienced. The confidence and boldness seen in the eyes of the men and women of my generation almost rivaled that of our ancestors in their fight for freedom centuries ago.

Though we had been locked up in our homes for months on end, our minds had gained the freedom they needed and nothing was ever going to be the same again. It was exactly the change and redirection we needed.



Achieng Nyar Duro,

or simply **Lashaun** as is her born name, is a Woman of Letters from Nairobi, Kenya.

She took up her pen at an early age and as her mum would say she has been writing ever since she tasted the earth's space. Now, she uses it as her medium to communicate a world of imagination, reality, and everything in between through poetry, spiritual understanding, short stories and so much more.

SITTING VIEWS

By Achieng Duro

I sat by the window and the view changed.
Yes it changed, but still remained the same.
I had a fluttering that ignited my body in waves.
Yes in waves, that saw the summer bring with it full gaze.
I sat by the window and the view emancipated.
Yes, emancipated, until I was jailed again.
I saw the greens and yellows and browns form into two,
Then with one knock, it was all taken from view.
I sat by the window and the view changed.
It was blue, and waved by like the oceans in tune.
Then the waves turned, to indigo news,
And with it my sight was no longer a view.
I sat by the window,
A window I sat by.
Its colors were the truest of what is called new,
Then they vanished, from my very view,
And I sat no longer there still, not breathing in the truth.
I sat, emancipated with truth,
And there was clarity, like a simple view.
But just as quick as I found the sweetest blues,
The moon and sun went silently into the core of the deep blue.
I sat,
Yes, I sat by the truth.
And sat was I,
With each view of you.
As I found, both sides of the coin, one to be true,
I said goodbye to the shimmer that was once true.



Anne Ierardi is a writer and painter. Anne illustrated *Walking with Grief: A Healing Journey* and created an exhibition of Women Jazz singers. She lives on Cape Cod and leads a center offering spiritual and astrological guidance. Her memoir, *Coming Alive*, will be published by Shanti Arts later this year.

A YEAR LATER

By Anne Ierardi

In 2020, my inner world came to express itself inside the walls of our ancient home. No one entered, front or back. No one drove in the driveway except for patio visitors.

Don Black next door died. He got too old. We lost sight of him. He fed birds, protected bunnies and came to my art shows. He studied nautical painting. I gave him some old wallpaper to paint on, he gave me the painting, now on the stairs to my studio. He was born in Greenland. One night of total darkness we were surprised by a knock on our door. Decked out in a shiny yellow raincoat holding a black lantern was Don making sure we were safe in the storm.

After he died, his son put American flags on every post in his front yard. I cursed, making left turns out of my driveway. New people moved in. They cut down all the trees. Two horses moved in.

I pined for Don Black and small creatures. Finally in April chipmunks scurried through the garden. Woody the woodchuck ate the kale Judy planted. I do not like kale. This year a newborn bunny ate the Italian parsley. I like parsley and I like bunnies.

Judy and I drew closer. We took care of ourselves and each other and mostly did what we liked as we did 40 years ago, before medicine and ministry claimed our bodies and souls.

The pandemic unleashed unspeakable tragedy. My family shrunk: relatives died of other things but without funerals. We watched a lot of cable news in the hope that facts might breed compassion and change. We gave money to progressive causes. She studied Italian. She gardened. I did everything since I love many things. The hardest thing is deciding which of them to do in the morning. I painted again as my body soaked up the freedom of color and motion. I returned to my first passion, astrology, via Zoom from Australia to London to California.

I kneaded bread and pizza dough, ordered flour from King Arthur in Vermont. We operated a food chain between my neighbor on the left. He left baguettes in our mailbox, oysters and clams on our stucco wall.



Arvid van Maaren became an avid bookworm owing to the endless stories her mum and the library supplied her with. Then one day, her writing teacher told her to skip stories and start poetry. The subsequent writing waves have already resulted in publications...leaving a craving for more! She tries to alternate between the UK and the Netherlands, and hopes to see all sorts of beaches again soon.

SEALED
By Arvid van Maaren

I have a complete universe
in my mind
and use the silent sea for a mirror
the thundering wind as a slate.
Is there a season
a reason to every-thing?
This
steel-grey blue stands
opposed to the ocean
I once knew
a lighter colour in lighter days
when I was still waterproof.
I will try and
not wear no worries
I must try and
think of trading
a random moon for a solid sun
anytime
and brace for the island of clouds,
drinks on the house.

Candace Arthuria Williams

began her career in Marketing Communications. Currently, she writes short fiction and essays in an expansive range of genres. During the pandemic, Candace completed a diverse collection entitled *Very Short Stories for Very Busy People*. Her objective—capture readers' imaginations without consuming too much of their time.

C/U/B/I/C/L/E/S

By Candace Arthuria Williams

Compartmentalize. Give each thought its own space. It's not like people. Sometimes we *have* to build the walls. The stream of consciousness must not run amok, for it will drive you insane.

Will they incinerate me? Who will mow the lawn? Is there spinach in the freezer? There I go again. Focus. One thought at a time.

The squirrels are munching on my acorns. Are they infected with the poison, too? Does anybody know for sure? Why can't the azaleas bloom for just a little while longer? The pink fades so quickly.

Inhale the bakery. Give loved ones their pastry while they can still smell it. But I can't. They are too far away and I cannot get close. Six feet under. Six feet apart. What's the difference? I'm reaching out, but I cannot touch you.

Turn on the stove and start dinner. I'm hungry for the things I cannot have. What a pretty color! I'd like to hand out dollars to the children, like candy on Halloween. That's fitting for the occasion. This is a horror movie. None of it is real. It is the stuff of antiquity. We were warned it could happen again. But nobody listened.

I can play hymns on my phone—or jazz or Willie Nelson. Stream normalcy with your friends, if they are still around.

Happy thoughts. Let in the happy thoughts. Put the others back in their cubicles. Compartmentalize, or they will drive you insane.



After a career as a dancer and actress, **Diana Eden** spent 30 years in Hollywood, costume designing television series, movies for TV, feature films, plus dozens of stage productions.

Stars in Their Underwear is Eden's memoir, covering her triple careers interacting with some of Broadway and Hollywood's biggest stars.

An Explosive YEAR OF #DISCOVERY

By *Diana Eden*

HASHTAGS #2020 #terribleyear #isolation #confinement #quarantine #depression #lockdown #separation and #distancing have all been the keywords during the COVID crisis.

What happens when your personal and emotional space is squeezed tighter and tighter? An explosion happens—an explosion that might include innovation and discovery. That is what happened to me.

Let me be clear. My thoughts in no way lessen my understanding of the suffering of so many people, people that I know personally or only know about. People's suffering is witnessed, those that have lost loved ones (or their own health), their businesses, their jobs, and means to support their own families, not to mention the loss of hope or optimism. Their pain is real, and I can only wish for them the emergence of new faith and confidence that things **WILL** get better and that new life will develop in ways we cannot yet see.

But here is what happened to me: Rather than my world getting smaller, it got bigger.

In my loneliness, thanks to the internet and Zoom, I reached out to new circles of potential friends—writers, travelers, dancers, and costume designers. In particular, four groups became central to my expanding world: *Journeywoman*, The International Women's Writing Guild, *Pivot Dancer* a website for helping dancers remain strong and injury-free, and costume designers of all stripes in all parts of the country.

One day, thinking back on an article I had read, I re-visited a favorite website, *Journeywoman*, founded by a Toronto woman Evelyn Hannon, whose focus was on women's travel and safety, especially solo travel. I saw that they had a community Zoom call every Friday. At 7 a.m. PST, which was a tad early for me, I made the first one. I discovered a wonderful community of women from all over North America and Mexico of various ages to share daily struggles and past travel experiences. I was back the following week. After all, on Zoom, I only had to be presentable from the waist up!

I also started writing about the intersection of dance and costumes for a new website called *Pivot Dancer*, founded by two enterprising young Canadian physiotherapists specializing in athletes and dancers. I have loved how welcoming they have been of me. I feel no distance between us because of my advanced age and their youth. (In fact, they helped me get up to speed on Instagram!). I now have five articles and one podcast on their site.

And how can I not mention the IWWG, a community of writers that has taught me and supported me all through my book's writing and production? IWWG provides many opportunities to connect, write, listen to other writers, and share one's work in the Open Mic sessions. I feel closer to a number of these writers than I did when I first met them in person at the Summer Conference of 2019.

At UNLV, I have become a better teacher. Through teaching on Zoom, I have better connected with my students in some respects (though I do like seeing their sweet faces in person). A new way of doing "production meetings" online has given us, students and teachers alike, a way to review the research we have done through screen sharing, allowing us to have a collaborative and informative discussion about the work.

During this period of isolation, I have watched and learned from recorded interview shows and panel discussions on costume design in particular. Best of all, I can attend Zoom "parties" where I don't feel like the odd one out. Being somewhat shy in large social gatherings, I have often felt like the little invading cell on the outside of an amoeba, trying to poke my way into a conversation group not opening up to let me in. But now I am just in a box, along with everyone else, haha!

May the future continue the trend of the circles getting bigger and bigger and ever more inclusive.



Evelyn Crawford Rosser, a retired educator, currently resides in Danielsville, Georgia. She has published two novels: *Too Late for Tears* and *Dancing Naked under Palm Trees*. Her writings have appeared in *Life Notes: Writings by Contemporary Black women*; *Changes: Readings for Writers*, and *Celebration: Visions and Voices of the African Diaspora*.

MY GIFT FROM COVID-19

by *Evelyn Crawford Rosser*

The interloper crept in like a thief in the night causing high fevers, nausea, and unexplainable deaths. America had been invaded by the coronavirus. I found myself deprived of the simple joys of life: going to sports events, dining in restaurants, shopping at the mall, or just spending time with family and friends. I felt helpless, abandoned, and alone. Friends, acquaintances, and strangers came to my rescue, flooding me with acts of kindness as often as they could while putting their own safety at risk.

With my needs being met, I had time to identify the issues that were hindering me from becoming the best me I am capable of becoming. One big problem was making peace with my past. I lived with an attitude of “if only” and “what if,” robbing myself of joy and hope. Looking back had caused me to let too many toxic people live in my head. They owed me rent for the space and time they had occupied in my mind. I was forced to take a good look at myself, and to own who I was and to choose my priorities. After days of self-evaluation and taking ownership for the decisions I had made, I decided I could choose to live a more productive life. What started as a burden was rapidly becoming a blessing. COVID-19 had revealed the importance of living each day to the fullest. I realized that I must suck the marrow out of each day. I also became determined not to obsess over what others think of me. I would no longer let society dictate the standards for me to be counted as a “person of worth.” I would make choices based upon my personal value system.

I now refer to my period of isolation as “COVID’s gift to me.” It was a gift of self-acceptance and peace. I received the ability to stop being a prisoner of yesterday’s choices. Gone is the practice of second guessing my past decisions. I am allowed to make mistakes. Most of all, I realized that I am enough. God created me the way he wanted me to be. I have accepted all of me—the good and the bad. I have finally silenced the voices in my head, gained more self-respect, strength, and wisdom than I have ever had during my seventy-seven years on earth. The acts of humanity shown to me convinced me that I must find a way to make showing generosity to others a part of my daily living long after the pandemic has ended. I am inspired to take Gandhi’s advice to “live as if you were to die tomorrow” and to “learn as if you were to live forever.” My new attitude is my gift from COVID. The rest of my life will be the best of my life.



Gwyndolyn D. Parker

Author, poet, Songwriter

Author of 10 books

- Rhyme In Time Perspectives
2014 Poetry Award
- Poet, 2017 Cultural Arts and
Humanities Program
- Atlanta Writer's Club 2020 Poetry
Contest Winner
- Douglas County 2021 Woman
Poet for Women in Business
- Douglas County 2021 Women in
the Arts Award

THE MELANCHOLY TABLE

By Gwyndolyn D. Parker

Our house always had a dog or a cat or both, sometimes with a goldfish or hamster thrown in for good measure. When my cat Bianca died at a ripe old age, I decided not to get another pet, thinking another pet might outlive me. The family had grown up and had pets of their own, homes or living spaces to take care of, so it did not seem right to add anything else to the equation.

We spend more time together now than we had spent when I was working. I was so grateful for Taco Tuesdays, Spaghetti Wednesdays, and Pizza Fridays, followed by Jeopardy and some serious “You know the answer,” pause, pause, “you know this” from my daughter. The show usually lasted an hour because my competitive daughter held the remote.

The only times we were able to do this when I was working were Christmas and summer vacation, when I would rent a house on the beach so we could all be together to laugh, eat, and play games for a week. Our Black family is small and tight, we love each other with an affection that is so genuinely beautiful my heart is always warmed by its knowing.

Being sprawled out over the East Coast, our times together always made us feel whole and connected; loved and valued; wealthy though poor.

Then COVID-19 came to visit the world, and travel ceased, texting became the prime method of communication by the young, the phone rarely rang, and the house was quiet. The silent house suddenly had me wishing I still had Bianca. She was a peculiar cat, liked to play, but did not like cat toys; pen heads, paper clips, balled up pieces of paper were her preferred sources of entertainment, and the middle of the night, her preferred time to play with them. I could go to sleep knowing she would creep downstairs and begin to play some imaginary game she had dreamed up for herself.

Her companionship would have been nice to break up the silence of the house. The icemaker would occasionally make noise, sometimes the house would creak, the television became white noise, but Bianca, I was used to talking to, without seeming crazy. COVID-19 solitude without her left me no choice but to have these conversations in my head with people, and later convince myself I had had it with the intended party

The kitchen table, that held so many breakfast, lunch, and dinners, was repurposed as my home office. There is no room on it for anyone but me to eat. There is no laughter, there are no games. Alex Trebek died, and I mourned his passing alone, because we could not be together to grieve as a family. It would have been a bigger remembrance before COVID-19, but now it was sandwiched in with lockdowns, travel restriction, food shortages, illnesses, my nephew's death grieved by phone, joblessness, silence, and loneliness.



Hollie Lianne is a stay-at-home mum, living in Glasgow with her fiancé and two children. She studied English and creative writing at university and her poetry has previously been published by *Forward Press* and *Razor Cuts* magazine. She is currently working on her first poetry anthology.

COMING OUT OF IT

By Hollie Lianne

I've missed sitting in cafes,
I've missed picking up on patter;
Broken bits of chatter
While the rain provides the pitter.
A mixing bowl of murmurs
That amount to nothing more
Than "fingered," "zoom" and "babygroup"
And the swinging of the door.
Adjectives amble into ears
And seek to tell me more,
While nouns name nothing much at all
And whispers creep to floors.
The kids all shout
As parents shush
And babies start to cry;
I drink the noise of words and sounds
Till my coffee cup runs dry.



Huma Kirmani is an author, a TEDx speaker, member of WWPF, Amnesty International, The International Women's Writing Guild, INSPAD, WEF, GGA, Honorary member of United Nations of Pakistan, Global Citizen Foundation, Global Union Ambassador in office of Pakistan GU, Winner of Books for Peace Special Award 2020 and She Awards, Dubai 2020.

TAKE UP THE GAUNTLET COVID19

By Huma Kirmani

Life may come back to me

I'm at home but not alone.

Life's not a quarantine

I wanna swim in the mainstream of giggles

Stroll in the meadows

To run after the butterflies

My little eyes can behold the rainbow arch

Beneath the haze of mortality

Life can't be obscured

I count more blessings than my regrets

I can't be Lucy Gray of #Wordsworth

My footprints wouldn't disappear

I'll bridge the gap of fear fearlessly

I maintain the spirits of my loved ones

The pandemic makes me closer to #Nature

Ah! Losing my loved ones

Associates the boundaries of death and birth
with fusion of Nature

In Heaven we all shall meet

I'll be back #Life



Jeannette Binebrink is a small business owner of an event management company based out of Annapolis, MD. She oversees operations and writes the company blogs.

When she's not working, she's a dedicated wife and mom to her energetic toddler while actively working on separate writing projects between spontaneous tea parties.

IS THE GRASS ALWAYS GREENER?

By Jeannette Binebrink

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

Fast forward to the unprecedented situation our world has faced—and how many U.S. states and other countries have ordered individuals to do just that thing. Stay home! Now, those same individuals are struggling to follow those orders and craving their previous way of life back.

So, is the grass always greener? There are certainly vital aspects of the way we lived that need to go back, but have we considered aspects that may be best left behind?

As a working mom, I embraced this situation as a refresh moment to “clean out my in-boxes” and evaluate who and what I really missed and what matters. Hearing friends’ exhaustion from their previously high-paced life and then disoriented by the forced slowdown made me rethink my own environment.

Am I being my best authentic self for my daughter, as a wife, around my family or friends?

The pandemic felt like a slap in the face waking me up to pay attention to who I surround myself with, what I digest through my mind and mouth, how I give back and to make more conscientious decisions versus misusing my time.

The grass looks different for everyone — and being busy won't miraculously disappear post-pandemic, but choosing to diligently “fertilize” my authentic self will surely create a more profound existence.



Joanne Bodin Ph.D., is an award-winning author and poet. Her novels, *Walking Fish* and *Orchid of the Night*, won multiple regional and national book awards in LGBT/ Historical Fiction. Her book of poems, *Piggybacked*, placed Finalist in the New Mexico Book Awards. Her poetry also appears in over twenty literary anthologies. Her website is www.joannebodin.com.

PANDEMIC TIME

By Joanne Bodin

Pandemic time isn't linear. Pandemic time bends reality as it ebbs and flows its waves of virus in tsunami warnings disregarded by those who wear blinders to truth.

Pandemic time makes its own rules where chaos is the norm Alternate realities prevail depending on one's perspective Pandora's Box now opened, we spin around in our individual spheres of self-deception where global warming is a hoax, where news is fake, where science is mocked, and where our past president suggested drinking bleach could cure the virus.

A hurricane of chaotic shifts in perspective, unleashed in a pressure cooker moment of a possible sixth extinction on a global scale. But there is always the eye of the hurricane where shadows give way to seasonal beauty, where golden leaves line pathways leading to silent sips of hot chocolate and self-reflection, and where winter's next frost reminds us that even pandemic time is really borrowed time.



Joyce Solomon Mettelman

grew up in upstate New York, where she learned to love reading, writing, art and the natural world. A Vassar '52 graduate, she married, helped bring up three children, traveled, published poetry, learned to make paper and books and to create art. She has published two books of poetry: in 2017, *Journey*, in 2021, *A Poet Walks Through A Pandemic*.

BREATHE

By Joyce Mettelman

I touch a match to candles, wave my hands in circles as my mother did,
fan the flames, create light, allow them—and me—to breathe.

When a certain slant of light brings me back to memories
of winter, snow and early darkness, I welcome it, breathe it in.

Because I live in daily sunshine now—summer, fall, winter, spring—

I breathe in a pestilent haze, a place where the words “I can’t breathe”
take on double meanings.

Solitude, that stubborn melody, plays in my ears, weakens my limbs,
unsettles my dreams.

I’m masked now, detached now; the world feels artificial.

I breathe in a new emotion: Fear.

I imagine things I don’t want to—a cough, fever, breathlessness
the lack of touch, an ultimate aloneness.

Will I ever see my loves—my children, my friends—again?

In limbo now, we have lost that slant of light, that flame, that beacon.

Listening to the news, I can barely breathe.



Judith Prest is a poet, photographer, mixed media artist and creativity coach. Her poems have been published in eight anthologies and in literary journals and her chapbook, *After*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. Judith's poetry collection, *Geography of Loss*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in July 2021.

JUNE SECOND 2020

by Judith Prest

Today, when there's a weasel
in the attic, a madman in the White House,
fire and murder in the streets,
pandemic circling the planet,

I want to lie down
next to the rabbit and the fawn,
draw strength and solace from trees.

When corporate greed and "color blind"
privilege taint the atmosphere,
no one can breathe.

When the song of the wood thrush
and scent of honeysuckle fill the air
I think I will find respite.

Today my brown-skinned son
comes to help us weed our garden,
leaves an island of weeds
to protect a bird's nest.

Today when my gentle artist son
drives from the garden
to the gun store,
driven to purchase a weapon
to protect his dear ones,

I want to break
my teeth on rocks,
fill my ears with sand
and throw my broken
heart into the flames.




Kate Meyer-Currey was born in 1969 and moved to Devon in 1973. A varied career in frontline settings has fuelled her interest in gritty urbanism, contrasted with a rural upbringing. Her ADHD also instils a sense of 'other' in her life and writing.

RE-EMERGENCE

By Kate Meyer-Currey

I was one of the many, not the few; but I can't say I ever felt like a so-called frontline hero. Rainbows and applause are not my way. I just kept working and the world shrank to something I heard about on the radio or breathed in through my mask. I felt like mine was the only car on the road those first surreally bright spring days of lockdown. There was a sense of waiting: queues and roadblocks. I felt detached; just glad I could keep my head down and go to work and see my mother. My closed psychiatric ward was another world and the pandemic was far away. Or seemed so. To patients it was simply another symptom of a deluded universe. Their restricted lives narrowed further, like hardened arteries where life-blood fights to circulate. Things eased for a while and we breathed more easily and let the masks drop in relief. Early this year, Covid hit my hospital and the ward locked down. Scrubs, PPE, donning and doffing, were the order of the day. Colleagues got sick or self-isolated. Tests were issued; staff and patients vaccinated. I grafted and sweated on, through goggled haze of call-bells, observations and body-fluids, armed with alcohol wipes. Patients scoffed at our gloves and aprons or informed the test and trace helpline that they were confined in a concentration camp where staff had infected them with COVID-19. Some believed we stole their quarantined mail and I countered accusations with gritted teeth, clenched with desperate patience behind my mask. I did 16 hour days, sometimes slept in the ward and got up to rinse and repeat.



I could not believe I was infection-free;
I felt guilty. Work was unrelenting.
I was bad-tempered and weary of it all;

I wanted the rivers of sweat that poured
off me to carry me far away from days that
began and ended in the dark. I even wished
for a positive result so I could have a two-week
rest. Nothing heroic there. Just a grumpy,
bone-tired middle-aged woman pushing back.
But spring crept in, colleagues returned and
patients got better. Imperceptibly, a newer
normal resumed. PPE was gone and it was
business as usual. Kind of. Restrictions ease
but life is different. It is watchful and hesitant.
A trip into the city centre shopping felt covert;
I had not been there for a whole year.
It's like the clock stopped but I was the
hand stuck at the point this all began,
struggling to move round the dial of life
at its old pace. I'm a stone heavier and
my nose is abraded from the detested masks.
I smoke too much and crave sugar. But I am
one of the lucky 76%: with a job, a car and a roof.
I lost no-one and never got sick. I was one jump
ahead of the wind of change the pandemic blew
over the world. It was the year I began to
write in earnest and that is what I have
taken from all of this; my life as a poet
flourished in a sterile environment. I did
not want COVID to be part of my writing
life because I tried to pretend it had nothing
to do with me. But as one of that 76%, that's
disingenuous. We are all changed, have
given, taken, lost and found different selves
in this strange time. And maybe one of you
will read this as you emerge, blinking at the
light and think 'it was like that for me, too.'



Kathleen Spivack is the author of 12 books of poetry and prose: Doubleday, Graywolf, Knopf, and others. She has won innumerable honors, grants, prizes, her work has been published worldwide. For more information please go to www.kathleenspivack.org, or to her authors Facebook page, created by recent publisher Alfred A. Knopf.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

By Kathleen Spivack

and he said to me
live and be happy
coming back coming back
and I heard him in the flowers,
the tender new leaves, little hands
unfolding,
and I heard him in the sky;
the rooftops as in
archetypal
photographs:
and he said to me
live.
be happy.
Listen, said everything, give this
attention. remember: that whispering,
was it the wind;
the ocean telling its consolations?
foals
unfolding wetly at their mothers'
sides and tottering to stand?
the upturned flowers
in their simplicity?
(Understand)?
the sadness was finished; the failures.
The night sky
didn't trouble as it once had;
And his bald swollen
broken body
was made whole again,
entering the cosmos
in a great dust/ light/ energy/ particle/ swirl:
the glare and white whoosh of the Yes.
live and be
happy, Kathleen,
he said (as he turned).
And I would.



Leslie Neustadt is a poet, collage artist, and the author of *Bearing Fruit: A Poetic Journey*. Her work is inspired by the natural world, mortal joys and struggles, and her commitment to human rights. She served on IWWG's Board, as a mentor, and created the Free Write series.

CLAY FEET, CIRCA 2021

By Leslie B. Neustadt

I

The air expectant, the sky, a dirty white.
The first robin feasts on my lawn.
Muddy mole tracks zig zag across my crabgrass,
clotted with pinecones, and desiccated leaves.
The starburst magnolia dares the scolding air.
Birds scat, riffing off each other. If only
I could join in, I would master the ripple
of sky, the rustle of wind, the sanctuary
of trees. Like iron anchors, my feet pull
me down to sodden ground.

II

I miss the guttural screech of gulls at the beach,
sand pelting my legs, surfers skirring waves
like a band of black seals. Most of all, the little girls
who stole my heart—granddaughters enticing me
to quack as if it were my only word. At times,
it feels that way. Words wooden in my mouth,
my throat, a quagmire of acid and bile.
I want to lay my head on the robin's breast
and weep. I seek refuge from myself,
but find no quarter—my feet, discontent.
Where is the guardian of my dreams?
The unhoused wander the streets,
bellies howling, while I hunker in my home
before an ever-present screen
and cleave to food as if it could dispatch
dragons. It all comes down to my feet—



Her best projects are two kids and six grands, but **Linda Bergman** wrote 24 films and produced 5. She's been nominated for an Emmy and the Writer's Guild Award. Her musical, "Wanna Play?", was shot on PBS and won the Alpha Award in Children's Programs. She wrote 2 books on screenplay and teaches worldwide on Zoom.

FEEDING THE BODY AND THE SOUL

By Linda Bergman

As much work (writing and teaching) as I thought I'd get done during the "down time" began slowly evaporating as the pandemic took hold. I gave up on the every-day ideas and began looking for a way to help the bigger issue.

I found it here in my own state and two hours away by car. A dear friend and colleague from the Guild, Dixie King, called and asked if I could help coach her teens (16-24) in Kern County to write a script and make a documentary film about their suffering from food insecurity. They took to the challenge easily and followed all directional arrows that I provided to take charge themselves. They wrote, filmed and directed the entire project. My heart soared as I saw the first footage, then dropped below my knees as I realized the true danger at hand. This wasn't a made-up story from LaLa land. This was real life and many of the residents were on the brink of losing all they had.

Kern is the second largest agricultural producing county in the United States, yet Bakersfield has the highest rate of food hardship in the nation. Food from this area is sold everywhere across the nation and in Europe, but Kern! Even before the pandemic made it worse, the problem destroyed families struggling to make ends meet. The pressure caused mental and physical breakdowns, leaving children to fend for themselves.

In February 2020, Dixie's group, TYM4Change, partnered with the Kern Youth Making Change AmeriCorps program (through the Community Action Partnership of Kern) to examine the impact of food insecurity on Kern County residents. **Then, in March 2020, COVID-19 hit and food insecurity became a national concern as businesses closed and grocery shelves emptied.**

Our documentary, "Invisible: The Unseen Faces of Hunger in Kern" launched in May 2021. In it, we raise awareness about food insecurity in Kern, the factors that contribute to it, what local organizations are doing to address it, and how we all can help.

These kids taught me to take nothing for granted, even as my own food sources came into question during the pandemic at its worst. They taught me about perseverance, honesty and demanding real and true friendship from those around me in a normal times as well as in crisis. They opened my heart and mind to community-thinking, rather than me-thinking. I will be forever grateful.



Marty Temkin (she/her) is a graduate of Boston University. She is an award-winning copywriter and has been coined an “accidental poet”.

She is currently working on her first chapbook and novel and believes IWWG saves her sanity. Her work has appeared in several venues including NPR. She lives in NYC.

Photo Credit: Mel Altman

WOUNDED

By Marty Temkin

This poem is not about
my mother’s magnolia tree
that blossomed briefly but
still lives on in memory.

This poem is not about
you or me or how I swaddle
my body in what used to be.

This poem is not for primroses
or pussy willows wishing
the pandemic pass predictably.

This poem is not a cozy
cocoon but a weeping wound
on a withering White woman
waiting for a scab to form.



Marcella S. Meeks has been writing since 1988. Her work has appeared in *Authorship*, *National Writers Association*, *Primary Treasure*, *The Guide Magazine* and *Our Little Friend*, *Smarty Pants for Kids*, *Funds for Writers*, *First Writer Newsletter* and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, to name a few.

ON WRITER'S BLOCK

By Marcella S. Meeks

Dear Writers,

These past six weeks have been the hardest. There are so many things I want to do this time of year, especially outdoors in my flowerbed. There is a story I started several weeks ago just sitting on my computer. I'm three type-written pages in and that's it. What is wrong with me? When I think it might be a good time to slip into my office and work on it, suddenly I remember the hydrangeas need to be repotted or someone shows up wanting to sit on the porch and drink coffee and talk about a whole lot of nothing. Even so, when I do get free time to write, I just don't want to do it. I can invent excuses to keep from doing any writing whatsoever.

That's just it, guys! I love to write. It's who and what I am. But when I sit down at my computer, I am stumped and have no words.

Have you ever had that experience? Is it what we writers know as writer's block? I read an article a few years ago where the writer didn't believe in writer's block. Whatever it is, or whatever the reason I can't get motivated to write, there's something causing it. I am not a lazy person at all. Thing is, I'll sit down and make out long lists in long hand or I'll type things up that have absolutely nothing to do with writing and store them on my computer.

My daughter used to live a couple hundred miles away and I'd write to her every week until she got her cell phone and then we'd text each other every day. That eliminated writing letters for me, which I really enjoyed because most of the time they'd be five or six pages long. She'd reply with a one or two page letter the following week. Now, we text each other several times a day but she has long since moved closer to me, which also eliminated letter writing altogether.

I have never been without something to write about, and I've never dreaded writing, whether it's a letter or a story or an article. Usually after writing a letter to my daughter back in the day, I'd start working on a story idea or contemplate it afterwards, and before long, I might have several writing projects going at once.

Writer friends, I think this might be a mixture of writer's block and spring fever. I want to get outside and do anything to keep from being cooped up inside staring at my computer screen. I tried moving it to the porch but that didn't help either so I parked it back in my little office and simply aborted that mission altogether. Didn't work for me...

Writer's block or this idiotic notion to procrastinate is real—it has caused a huge slump in my creative inventions for days on end and I just can't seem to get past it.

I did figure out ways to motivate myself to write again, and one way is to free write whatever comes to mind for ten minute intervals. It worked for a while, then it got a little boring, but at least I was writing a little.

And I write in my journal daily, another great way to write something each day.

I subscribed to three different writer's magazines this past month in an effort to find the inspiration and motivation I need to write again, and this might have solved some of the problem. I subscribed and read three recent issues cover-to-cover of *The Writer*, *Writers Digest*, and *Poets and Writers*. There are other online writers' websites that have made a difference as well. I think it has helped to some degree because that story I started working on weeks ago, I am now tossing around in my mind trying to figure out where I want it to go and who my readers are. At least it's a start.

Reading articles on different aspects of writing in these particular publications and websites has helped me to start writing again, and to break the procrastination or writer's block that hung around for weeks. Looking back and seeing how little was done during this period really makes me sore because there were things that needed to be edited, rewritten and other story ideas needed to be worked on. And all that wasted time when I could have been writing and submitting. Six unproductive weeks—nothing to show. Time wasted.

Have you ever procrastinated like that or been plagued with writer's block? How did you overcome it? What did you do to get motivated?

Well, it's been a long last six weeks and I need to end this letter so that I can start on some of the work that should have been done weeks ago. I've got a ton of story ideas that are jumping out of my brain left and right, and I need to snag a couple of those interesting story ideas and write them down so I'll have something to submit next week! You know how it is—we writers can be stumped one minute and on a roll the next.

Until next time, be safe and happy writing...



Marie Johnson-Ladson is a writer of poetry, prose & short stories from the United States. She has a passion to find beauty and reality in the World we live in. Besides writing, she loves to do photography and listen to music. She has been published in *Ben Speaks*, *Friday Flash Fiction* and *Spillwords*.

I REMEMBER WHEN COVID-19 ATTACKED US

By Marie Johnson-Ladson

I Remember When

I first heard of the COVID-19

It was on the news

They were telling us that this virus was in China and hitting the people hard

It seemed so far away and I wasn't worried

Then I heard the virus had taken the lives of a few people in Seattle, Washington

Still I wasn't worried

Then it started showing up more and more in the United States

I realized that this was a big deal and really serious

I Remember When

Covid-19 Attacked Us

It started hitting us hard

It was like a hurricane hit us overnight when we were sleeping

But it kept coming back night after night

It wouldn't stop it was like missiles that saw their target and aimed to hit hard

It was an invisible enemy that shook our world

It was an invasion on our bodies

Some of us got sick and were able to recover

Some of us started losing our families, friends and neighbors

It seemed like a dream that we were stuck in and couldn't wake up

It was a nightmare

We didn't know how to fight back the virus that was attacking us with a vengeance

It was violent and hurt us badly

We were told first to stay a certain distance from one another, cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze

Then we were told to stay 6 feet away and to wear face masks and gloves which was called social distancing

People were on lock down and going crazy

They missed the togetherness and human contact

We kept in contact by using phone calls, social media and/or text messaging

We were able to survive because of the Essential and Medical Workers

They were a blessing and our Heroes

I Remember When

Covid-19 Attacked Us

Every day when we awoke was a victory and a chance for a new beginning

It was a challenging time

It was time to embrace each other by thinking positively and not letting the enemy think it had beaten us

It was time to stay vigilant

It was time to keep our bodies and minds mentally strong to fight the enemy

It was time to stay encouraged

It was time to stick together

It was time to fight back

It was time to keep your guard up and be ready in case of another attack

Hopefully, we will learn from this and make the world a better place

I Remember When

Covid-19 Attacked Us.



Marilyn June Janson M.S. Ed. specializes in writing children's chapter and picture books, short fiction, YA, and personal essays. She is the owner of Janson Literary Services, Inc. Contact her at www.janwrite.com for developmental editing, writing, and publishing workshops. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

"INHALE. EXHALE. REPEAT."

By Marilyn June Janson

I don't look or act stressed.

Inside my head, I'm screaming.

February 22, 2021. The US passes 500,000 COVID deaths and 90 million cases.

My panic attacks are triggered by relentless worries about illness and dying.

Diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive, anxiety disorder, and agoraphobia,

I could have groceries delivered and see doctors on video chats, never to step outside my

house ever again.

February 2020 – March 2021. Phoenix, Arizona.

Before leaving my house, I triple-check the doors and window locks, lights, and electrical items.

I breathe deeply, exhale, and repeat two more times.

A, b, c, d...

Saying the alphabet and checking items helps me to redirect my attention away from my

fears and anxieties.

Still, the weakness in my legs threatens to keep me home.

Grabbing my car keys, I open, lock the door to the house, and check it three times.

The garage door opens, I get into my car, and drive out.

I click the remote and watch the door as it clanks closed.

Closed.

I drive away.

Did I close it?

I drive back to check it.

Closed.

I drive to the store, park, and put on two masks, and two pairs of gloves.
Months after learning that COVID is not transmitted through touch, I still worry about catching the virus from customers.
Arizona has a mask mandate. Not all customers obey this rule.
Carrying a clear shopping bag (no touching the carts), I go inside.
Before getting food, I work hard to find the disposable gloves, masks, and Clorox wipes.
The store frequently changes the location of these items.
My heart skips, sweat saturates, and head spins.
Inhale. Exhale. Repeat. A, b, c, d...
Playing a game of cat and mouse, I turn and move away from other shoppers.
A sneeze, and millions of COVID microorganisms could infect, and kill me.
I grab the items, toss them in my bag, and rush to a vacant self-check kiosk.
Exhausted, every minute inside the store feels like torture.
Quickly, I scan the items and use a credit card. No germie stylus needed to sign my name or punch the PIN code.
I pluck the receipt, my bags, and leave the store.
Inhale. Exhale. Repeat. A, b, c, d...
Inside my car I rip off the gloves and paper mask, and throw them into a plastic garbage bag.
I toss the cloth mask in another bag for laundering.
I put on a fresh pair of gloves, and use Clorox wipes to disinfect my car keys, door handles, and purchases. I toss the gloves and wipes into the garbage bag.
Inhale. Exhale. Repeat. A, b, c, d...

March 25, 2021. The Arizona Republic reports a new COVID strain in Arizona.
Fully vaccinated, the Pfizer-BioNTech doses are reported to be 90% effective.
Will I need more vaccinations to combat this new strain?

March 27, 2021. Governor Ducey (AZ) lifts the mask mandate.
I should feel confident to eat out and travel.
I'm just not there, yet.



Mary H. Wu is an ABC (American-Born Chinese) patient advocate, poet, published writer, and author of her journey as a two-time kidney transplant recipient *Confessions of a Kidney Transplant Recipient*. She is an avid foodie, tea drinker, traveler, writer, cat lover, and swimmer. Her website: "The Wu Way" www.thewuway.com.

100 DAYS

By Mary H. Wu

In 100 days
For the very first time
I heard the birds
Sing their songs
I watched them from afar
Fly so very high
In the bluest of skies
I counted the squirrels
Running around in circles
So close and yet so far
The moon and stars
They light the night
I smelled the flowers
In their golden hours
The sweetest smell
I lived to tell
The warmth of the sun
The fresh air filled my lungs
Big towering trees
Became my closest and dearest company
The grass so emerald green
Underneath my bare feet
The wonders of the earth
In all their beautiful birth
Made me realize about others and my worth
Held kitty cat Ricky Wu tight in my sleep
Had vivid dreams I keep
I brought colors to blank pages
I brought sparks to dark
Going through all the phases
All alone in the walls of my home
Missing hugs
Wishing for love
Feeling the fear
Praying for it to disappear

Understanding that I had more than I could have ever wanted
But I took it all for granted
Not knowing what I got
Until it was all gone
A simple touch
I never knew meant so much
Meant everything
When there was nothing
I laughed until I cried
I cried until I laughed
Savoring all I have
When it all turned into what I once had
I gave all, I tried
I lost and am finding hope
Doing my best to cope
When my friends died
When all suddenly closed down
I slowly shut down
Yet I like to say that I lived and learned more than I could ever imagine
I am gaining the thickest skin
Living with my losses
Wondering about my wins
All that seems so wrong
Somehow could and can be right again
For myself and all of us to begin again
The days that felt so long
Actually went by much too fast
With the mantra that nothing ever lasts
So they say "This Too Shall Pass"
Today
Yesterday
Every single waking day
I am still making my way
I counted the days
All in 100 days
And still counting...



Patricia Flaherty Pagan

was born in Boston and has lived in four countries. She is the author of *Trail Ways Pilgrims: Stories* and *Enduring Spirit: Stories*, as well as the writer of award-winning literary, crime, and horror short fiction. Learn more about her at www.patriciaflahertypagan.com. Follow her on Twitter @PFwriterright.

HOPE'S ECHO

By Patricia Flaherty Pagan

Hope is the low hum
beneath the soundless blitzkrieg.

May you hear it from your window
as you bathe in fragile sunlight,
while the virus and the vaccines
wage silence.

Catch its echo in a Mason jar,
like a firefly.
Save it for tomorrow,
for your son and daughter
clip-clopping on the balcony,
bilingual unicorns.

Listen.



Susan Emmer Schmidt is a retired holistic physician who was ordained by Thich Nhat Hanh into his Order of Interbeing, where she leads mindfulness groups and mentors individuals. Her passions include learning, reading, beauty, nature, traveling, cooking and gardening, while cultivating joy, gratitude and peace. She enjoys memoir writing and Haiku.

PANDEMIC TRAVELS *By Susan Emmer Schmidt*

I come by my wanderlust honestly,
Bequeathed to me by my Dad,
Who felt instinctively
That life without fun experiences in new and different places
Was no life at all.

So off we would go to see how chocolate was made,
Drive to Florida groves to pick our own oranges,
Visit New England seaports to choose a lobster for dinner.

I think he would beam with pleasure at the destinations
Of some of my jaunts:
Whether to the shores of Galilee,
Denali and the Alaskan wilderness,
Or sleeping in Granada caves across from the Alhambra.
Next stop: Iceland
To view the Aurora Borealis from its wild terrain.

But, there's no world travel in the time of a pandemic.
Not only to the exotic or far flung destinations,
But even easy trips to visit family and friends,
Hold them close,
Allow hugs,
No longer possible.

And then it occurred to me:
Armchair travel.
A trip within.
Taking the time to go deep,
Inside heart and soul, deep,
Inside the canyons of my mind,
Traveling the feelings, beliefs, ideas
That dwell within
The interior territory
I call my life.
Now...that's a trip!



Sarah Metzgar is an avid reader and has always enjoyed writing short stories and poetry. She is 35 years old and lives in Connecticut with her loving husband, Robert, and their feisty puppy, Lucy.

A COVID MISCARRIAGE

By Sarah Metzgar

Your glasses fog up as you enter the lobby
Every breath through your mask makes it worse
You cannot see,
But you cannot take it off
You wish your husband were by your side
But thanks to COVID you must enter alone
You are afraid
Of being exposed
For you
For your unborn child
You are afraid of so much more
Your nerves overwhelm you
As you enter the office, smelling hand sanitizer and latex,
And you feel you may suffocate.
A nurse asks you questions
It is robotic
You have been asked and answered these questions before
The nurse is checking off her boxes as she takes your temperature
You struggle against a panic attack
Sure you will faint before you can take a seat
You fidget in the waiting room
Another woman
Her belly large with the late stages of pregnancy
And with a toddler in tow
Is called in before you
Your own belly is flat
Hers is so round
Yours has always been flat
You have never made it past the first trimester
Many tries, many failures
You are overwhelmed by a rush of jealousy
You blush in shame

It's your turn now
You are poked and prodded in an exam room
There is static on the ultrasound
It makes sense to the technician, but not to you
You feel the fate of the world riding on that static
But all you see is chaotic noise
You are sitting in the doctor's office now
The sky is clear and blue outside the window

The sun is shining high in the sky
It is a beautiful day and
A white orchid is in full bloom on the windowsill behind the doctor
A mask covers the doctor's face
But her eyes tell you the truth
Something is wrong
Again
"Unhealthy pregnancy"
What a benign term for the destruction of hope
Your world falls apart
Yet you are determined not to cry in front of the doctor
You swallow back your denials
You've been down this road before
Only, before, you had a hand to hold
Reflexively, you reach for it
But today
You face the doctor's eyes
Alone
You let the world go numb
Until you can leave
And break the news
To your loved one
You enter the car
You tear off your mask
You take his hands in yours
And tears
At last

Wrack your frame
And break your heart



Therese Gleason grew up in Kentucky, and has lived in Spain, Ghana, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C. She is author of two poetry chapbooks: *Libation* (University of South Carolina Poetry Initiative, 2006) and *Matrilineal* (Finishing Line Press, 2021). A literacy teacher and mother of three, she lives in Worcester, MA.

PAXTON POOL, SUMMER OF 2020

By Therese Gleason

“I can wade grief, / Whole pools of it,— / I’m used to that. / But
the least push of joy /
Breaks up my feet...”

-Emily Dickinson

Sitting under the huge old spruce
with my friend, languid in lawn chairs,
we listen to our kids hoot and holler,
splashing in the L-shaped pool down the hill.
This breezy patch of sun and shade our oasis
for only a few weeks more, a fraught
school year looming: classrooms reduced
to screens of boxed faces, children
as profile pics.

Both of us teachers, we report for duty
soon, a “hybrid” start, masked, face-
shielded, trying to smile with our eyes,
hug students from six feet apart.
We sip iced coffee, chat softly,
absorbing fresh air and light
like balm into our bodies,
stockpiling calm.

A peripheral motion catches my eye:
a small clump hopping on raspy grass,
a cicada or locust? No, a green frog
no bigger than a cricket! The kids swarm,
wet skin glistening, bathing suits
a rainbow of primary colors, each one
taking a turn to cup the tiny creature
in puckered palms. An ache
molts behind my ribs—

the boys sprint to shatter
the smooth pool in a shower of cannonballs
and our daughters squat by the chain-link
fence to release their jittery charge. I hold
my breath as the frog jumps a jagged route
across hot asphalt toward the woods—
a misshapen little heart
pumping in fits and starts—
and the low brush parts.

TIME, COVID-19 AND I By Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni



Wanjira Muthoni is a creative writer from Kenya. She has published poetry and short stories aimed at sensitising the youth on various issues of importance to African societies such as cultural awareness, gender issues and the need to build strong societies for the future, based on the contribution of older generations.

Does time exist
Or do I just dream of it?
I have not seen my grandchildren –
Two whole years since the COVID-19 lockdown
Here and in their country

Time does exist
The moment I hear
Their beautiful voices on the phone
Their speech that improves
By the day and after day
Then –
Time does exist

It saves me from wondering
Since I am busy imagining
All the beautiful things
That with them I would be doing
All the wonderful places
We would have visited
Were it not for this pandemic

Time does not save me from boredom
As COVID-19 numbers steep
It does not save me from thinking
About disease day and night
But it allows me to interact
With strangers on Zoom
Present enough to share thoughts with

As I wait to see the faces
Of my grandchildren on Skype
At the weekend
Time becomes real
But as I partake of the lie
That I am hugging them
Time becomes a lie

So,
Does time exist?
Who cares?
Is it a lie?
So what if it is?
All I need is for it to move
And deliver my grandchildren to the present
That I may enjoy every single moment of it with them.



Xiaoly Li is a poet, photographer and computer engineer. Her poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in *Spillway*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Rhino*, *J Journal* and elsewhere; and in several anthologies. She has been nominated for Best of the Net, Best New Poets, and a Pushcart Prize.

On That Street
— for those young protesters
By Xiaoly Li

Boggy air

pepper smell

he and she

kiss under

AI eyes

masked, goggled

not caged-song

canaries

but eagles