



Life in the Time of Corona
Special Edition of The Legend
West Florida Literary Federation, Inc.

May 2020



From the Editor:

In times of crisis we come together. In 2004, West Florida Literary Federation published an *Emerald Coast Review* with accounts of Hurricane Ivan's devastation on the area. Six years later, WFLF launched an online magazine, *The Spill*, offering writers an opportunity for catharsis during the 2010 Deep Water Horizon BP Oil Spill. Now, a decade later, we find our region in another crisis -- this one with a more global reach. Again, we wanted to offer catharsis for writers to explore the impact of the coronavirus on our region. Since part of West Florida Literary Federation's mission is to preserve the literary works of Northwest Florida as well as encourage writers, we feel it imperative local writers document our community in this time of pandemic.

We were overwhelmed with the voices and words we received in this call. You'll read pieces from health care professionals, including a personal account from one in the COVID-19 "hot spot" in our community. Poetry, personal essays, images and even a piece of satire reveal our states of mind and lives during this time. Although the overall tone of this collection is somber, some humor and whimsy make us smile.

During the month we received submissions, our world changed rapidly and continues to change. By recording this historic event, we join the ranks of many who understand the importance of literature and art in society.

Thanks to our panel of readers who enthusiastically considered your work and its merit seriously: Karen McAferty Morris, Diane Skelton, Lucie Wade, and Jeannie Zokan.

Thanks to our submitters for sharing their thoughts.

Not all works submitted were selected by the readers, but all those who submitted are encouraged to revise and resubmit for the upcoming Phase II online edition. Please encourage fellow writers, WFLF members and nonmembers alike, to join in our documentation of *Life in the Time of Corona*.

It is with pleasure and pride we present *Life in the Time of Corona* to you. We hope you glean insight into and hope for the human condition from the perspectives expressed in these pages.

Thank you for reading our works.

Andrea Jones Walker
Legend Editor
May 2020

Prayer to The Theotokos

Bob Ave

Southern Oaks was a new nursing home in which I started working back in November of 2019. Before that I had been at the Life Care Center of Pensacola. I am a social worker. I had left the erratic and corrosive lifestyle of a state investigator for a more mundane, routine, sedentary job two years before. Or, so I thought.

Early April of 2020, COVID-19 was rapidly spreading across the planet. Despite our best efforts, the virus entered the building unannounced. Two of our residents had shown minor symptoms. Following CDC guidelines, we tested and they were positive. We began isolation protocols. We had already stopped visitors and outside providers from entering the building. Only staff and essential deliveries were allowed. We monitored for more symptoms. Get your masks on. Get your personal protection equipment (PPE). N95 masks were reserved for staff that were doing hands-on care with patients. As a social worker I would continue to have face-to-face contact with residents. I traded my paper mask for the last N95 left—all the way at the bottom of the box. There would be no more for a while. There was a worldwide shortage. Keep it safe. I heard people were selling used ones on eBay for hundreds of dollars. I took a yellow highlighter and made a smiley face in the front of mine.

Tuesday of the third week of April I arrived at work at 7:45AM. I entered through the front door into the lobby. Staff had to “temp in” and do a questionnaire about symptoms. I hastily completed my questionnaire and had my temp taken. 97.5. . .good.

I put my N95 on and went to the Director of Nursing’s Office, the command center of the building.

The nurse practitioner saw me first. She was in complete PPE: face shield; N95; gown; shoe covers and gloves. She waived me over to the corner. “It’s bad,” she said.

“Define ‘bad,’” I asked.

“They tested all the residents yesterday with rapid testing. We’re still getting more results back. We’re up to 87 already.”

“87? Meaning residents? We have 87 positives?!”

“Almost all asymptomatic. Some had a light spike in temp. That’s it.”

Holy shitburgers! I thought. *This day now officially sucks!*

“87 now. We’re not done yet. That means positive numbers will go up?”

“They will,” she said.

And up the number went: 94 total, out of a building of 180+ residents. The highest of any building in Florida. It froze at 94. The best we could do was isolate, monitor and treat symptoms (if any) until the infection resolved itself. . .before the virus had a chance to take out the staff.

“Okay,” I said adjusting my N95, “I am headed up to my office.” Passing other staff on the way, no one made eye contact. I locked the door behind me—as if that would keep the virus out.

Positive patients were a few feet from my office. I looked over and noticed the empty chair of a coworker. She had abruptly left a week before without explanation. I guess watching the invisible haboob of a virus making its way toward us was too much.

I am going to die. I am going to infect my family. I will kill someone. Leave now. Don't come back.

No. I could not leave. If administration left, staff would quit in droves. There would be no one left. Residents would die. We're gonna hold the line! Just above my phone was my rosary hanging from a thumbtack on the wall. In Eastern (Byzantine) Catholicism, Mary is known to us (and the Orthodox) as the Theotokos. I am a former atheist-turned revert back to the Catholic Church. I did my best.

Blessed Theotokos, I pray for your intercession, for everyone in this building, protect us from this disease; pray for our vulnerable, our workers, our families. Pray that you may protect us from this horrible scourge that has descended upon us. . .

I picked up the receiver and dialed my wife. To date, that was the most difficult phone call I have ever had to make.

Okay, I just want to rewind this apocalyptic horror movie and take it back to Blockbuster. I have had enough for today, and it's not even nine yet.

My wife, Andrea, answered, "What's up?" she said.

"Umm. . .not good," I answered.

What to do

Charlotte Crane

What do you do when
you can't do anything
except sit around the house
'cause it's dangerous out there?
I found a fallen magnolia blossom this morning
on the squirrels' lunch table out back,
and brought it inside...
and it's given the kitchen a lovely smell.
(My success of the day!)

I played a game of solitaire
on the dining room table:
(I lost).

I called my relative
who's having a birthday today,
(She wasn't home.)

I fed a pack of cats with
nowhere else to go;
(We meowed.)

and I wrote some checks
to mail when I dare slip
them in the PO slot
(when I get the face mask I ordered.)

Might as well read the book
the library just renewed, by phone.
(It was already overdue.)

Me too.

The Earth Lives On

Ethan McGuire

A star burns hot in the universe.
Ninety-three million miles away,
a lively planet slowly circles:
 The Earth, and the Earth lives on.

Men scar the Earth's complexion, building
ziggurats, pyramids, Babel,
steel skyscrapers, reaching fingers.
 The Earth sighs; man's work crumbles.

Men assemble machines for pleasures.
Men steer machines to kill others,
shooting through the sky, exploding.
 The Earth breathes and brings a calm.

Men lift kind populists to power,
and populists aid their people,
but corruption's rot ever creeps.
 The Earth rules to heal the rot.

Authoritarians convince men,
convince people of their power,
erecting bold statues to boast.
 The Earth waits; the statues fall.

Populations grow, intermingle.
Viruses put fires to countries;
the fires spread fast through continents.
 The Earth brings rain to the flames.

Women birth men; men live, and men die.
Women give birth to men again.
Man is haughty, and he is strong.
 The Earth, she spins forever.

Covid 19 Sidewalk Chalk
4-16-2020
Ethan McGuire

On an unusually brisk April morning, unusually cold for the Florida Panhandle at fifty degrees, I watched as the rising sun illuminated the sidewalk beneath my feet on their way to work.

My feet were on their way to my hospital shift, despite my body's unwillingness and my own protest against comfortable but ugly green shoes. The gray and beige sidewalk at my feet ran parallel to both the highway and the front of the hospital, and this fact, for some reason, had placed me into a groggy-headed trance. I was under the spell of this trance until I saw a stretch of sidewalk where a local hospice company had attempted to cheer us all up by writing on the walk with chalk of assorted colors. Opening up the graffitied ground segment was a properly colored rainbow, and at the end of the segment were two yellow and orange suns. The middle of one sun read, "You are someone's sunshine," the other, "Making Days Brighter."

In between the rainbow and the sun, between each sidewalk joint, someone had written an uplifting or encouraging message:

"The world needs you," "Life is tough but so are you," "Heroes Work Here!" "Pensacola Loves You," "Keep smiling," "Shine like the stars," "Hold your head up," "Escambia's thankful for you," "You Rock!," "You save lives," "Always by your side," "You change lives," "You make a difference," "Stop HERE + Smile," "Thank You," "You are strong," "Heroes This Way ↑," "Stop, Smile, & Be Proud," "We appreciate You," "You are incredible," "Thank you, HERO!"

In addition to the messages, a few of the more artistic people in the group had added crudely drawn pictures to their words: a white and yellow pelican dancing with "LOCAL" emblazoned across its breast, a pattern of hopscotch squares containing hospital department names, a smudgy green and blue globe with stick people lined up across it, and certain thanks to specific nurses and doctors outlined in various handwritten but stylish fonts.

I grinned widely, showing my morning teeth beneath a disposable surgical face mask, which I was using because it was the only mask available to me at the time. Then I noticed a block of sidewalk that wormed its way into my mind and would not leave for the rest of the day, a place where dirty streaks of chalk lay scattered in some sort of explosion motif, as if someone had taken the multi-colored dust at the bottom of the chalk box, dumped it in one pile, and sprayed a whole bottle of water at the pile, transforming it into mud. I wondered what the smear might have previously said. Had it ever been any shape? Any words? Had it perhaps read:

"Why? My aunt has coronavirus. She languishes in your hospital even now, but your staff will not let me in to visit her, will not allow me into her room to comfort her, will not permit me to see for myself that she is indeed receiving the proper care, even though she raised me as her own daughter after my parents died when I was a kid. Why?"

If I could have found the phantom author of these complaints, could I have explained to her our precautions, or our doubts and fears?



Six Feet Apart
Susan Marie Molloy

COVID-19 from the Beginning Christina Larson, 2020

If Big Bang was the start,
with no one yet to hear,
what noise could it impart?

A more descriptive name,
“Commotion Set in Motion.”
‘Tho’ punch it lacks,
reflects the knacks of
land, fire, air and ocean.

And as the human race
stays its relentless pace,
wars, plagues, and aches
are what it takes
to make us slam the brakes.

Germ-scare! We dare not wander.
Subdued, we don’t go out.
A virus loose,
we’re all recluse, thus granted
time to pout and ponder.

No flesh-on-flesh. Don’t touch.
Six feet apart we keep.
It isn’t asking much.
Cough into sleeves,
curtail each sneeze,
lest we go six feet deep.

We tithe with sorrow staid
as tolls in lives are paid.
No planes or cars.
Kiss from afar.
Repent polluters’ ways.

Yet hope begins to rise
from mankind’s piteous phase.
As Earth revives,
rebalance thrives:
clean air, fresh waterways.

If we survive this doom
to leave our household womb,
as germs abate
at any rate
will harsh lifestyles resume?

Do inspired laws await?
Pandemic lessons learned.
Our species, wisdom earned?
Those who weather this storm
must create a new norm,
lest survivors repeat this dread fate.

May cleared vision remain 20-20,
worth way more than stuff, fame, or
money.

The industrial age
has outlived its rampage.
Folks resolve not to stray
from the balance in play
then the outlook for humans seems sunny.

Happy 50th birthday,
Earth Day.

View from Within **Diane Skelton**

I'm Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*, trapped inside with a bad leg and nowhere to go, staring out windows, seeking excitement. When I scheduled knee replacement surgery for Mardi Gras Day, I knew I'd be home recovering through March and well into April, but I never suspected millions of others around the world would also be confined, sheltering in place due to coronavirus. Above all, I never imagined surgical masks would be more expensive than Mardi Gras masks and staring out windows could be as exciting as watching a parade.

"View from My Window," a Facebook group, shares photos submitted by people around the globe showing what they see from their windows—their distractions from quarantine boredom. My Gulf Breeze, Florida, home has 21 windows, none of which offers a view to rival any photo posted on that social media site. My canal neighborhood, curiously named Polynesian Isles, showcases gorgeous sunsets over Escambia Bay for those who live in two-story houses or along the water. From my one-story a block from the bay, I can stand on tiptoe and glimpse a fraction of the sun setting -- a view made possible when a neighbor plowed down more than 20 pine trees.

I marvel at the breathtaking views posted on "View from My Window." A man in Dubai shared a shimmering night view from his towering skyscraper window, lights dancing like fireflies, spiraling down, down, down. When I look down from my front windows, about eight inches above the flower bed beneath, I see two brown anoles cavorting on a yard-art crow.

A woman in England posted a garden view from her back window and wrote how it calmed her after her mother's death. I look out the glass doors onto the screened back porch and see a destructive puppy sleeping, four legs in the air, one ear flopped sideways, exhausted from chewing the rug and gnawing on the wooden rocking chair. Calming? No. Comical? Yes.

One Australian shared an everyday view—wild kangaroos hopping through her yard. Every day I see wildlife from the wetlands across the street. Four mallards and their crippled female companion cross the street to snack on corn my husband leaves for them. After they dine, the males encircle the wounded hen, and they nap. When rested, they fly back to the wetlands, about a twelve-foot trip. We do have larger wildlife, though. If lucky, maybe I can snap an early morning picture of a bear strolling down the street, licking his lips after ransacking my neighbor's garbage.

I'm like the cartoon depicting a man and his dog on the couch. Both are leaning over the back of the couch staring out the window. The man turns to the dog and says, "Now I see why you get so excited when someone walks by." I understand. Yesterday I got excited when a family pedaling pastel-colored beach cruisers wheeled by and waved. They've traded beach sand for warm asphalt. Minutes later four schoolgirls hanging out a golf cart sped by, boldly defying Florida's social distancing golf law. These days, only one person is allowed in a cart on a golf course. The twelve-year-old driving was way off course -- the nearest one is two miles away.

I need a better view. The runners, ducks, lizards and puppy are failing to entertain. Now in my fifty-sixth day of confinement, I'm starting to fantasize. When my son dismantled a dilapidated metal shed in our backyard, I began mentally planting a garden to fill the void – sort of like the prisoner-of-war movie in which the character draws blueprints in his mind to keep his sanity. I'm imagining a tropical backyard transformed with colorful plumbago, lantana, azaleas, hibiscus, and butterfly ginger. In actuality, however, the thought of pushing a hoe or shovel with my still-mending knee forces me to sit down at the computer and visit another website – realtor.com.

The Enigma of Deadman's Island **Diane Skelton**

Centuries before the City of Gulf Breeze offered refuge for Pensacola residents seeking relief from the summer heat in quaint breeze-filled cottages and cabins, a nearby barrier island offered a different type of sanctuary. Deadman's Island provided quarantine for sick and dying seamen. But this ominous and legendary role as a place to die isn't the source of the island's name.

In today's coronavirus near-quarantine atmosphere, conversations often turn to past epidemics. Even though 300 Pensacolians died from the Spanish Flu in 1917 and 1918, it's the tales of men abandoned on Deadman's Island that spark legend and ghost tales.

Nearly 150 years ago, the island, still visible on Gulf Breeze's south side when crossing Pensacola Bay Bridge, housed the Naval Quarantine station. Here ships from around the world hoping to dock in Pensacola Bay were required to stop so officials could check the health of the crew. According to archives housed by the University of West Florida Historic Trust, this site saw yellow fever quarantines in 1874 and 1875. When ships arrived, yellow fever victims were treated, and the vessels were fumigated. When the Deadman's Island's quarantine station closed in 1882, it was replaced by a new station on Santa Rosa Island.

Despite quarantines, epidemics, an unmarked cemetery, unearthed coffins, a ship graveyard, and tales of mourning the dead, scholars say the island's name has nothing at all to do with death.

Artifacts unearthed there date as far back as the Paleoindian period, approximately 12,000 years ago. The French, Spanish and British, when settling the Florida territory, all made use of the island. The Spanish called it "Carenero," a place to careen ships. The Spanish and the British used the island from 1698 to 1821. The island offered a deep water drop-off, fifteen to twenty feet, and created a natural dry dock or careening beach, where ships could be tilted or careened on land, and their hulls scraped and cleaned.

In maritime terms, a "deadman" is a device fixed on the shore to which a cable and winch are attached to hoist a wooden ship partially out of the water. Capt. Shirley Brown, whose grandfather built a shipyard on Deadman's Island, explained in *Pensacola Sea Stores: A Story of Pensacola's Maritime History* that a deadman was used to "restore life to wooden sailing ships at the turn of the century." The deadman was "usually a large tree or a huge block of concrete with the bulk of it buried deep in the sand. The free end of the cable was looped around a stout mast on the ship then brought back to the deadman where a winch was attached. This enabled the

workers to slowly pull the ship over to one side exposing the underside so necessary repairs could be made.”

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Deadman’s Island and the Port of Pensacola were a frenzy of activity. Capt. Brown, in a 1997 talk to the Gulf Breeze Area Historical Society, says his father, who was born in 1877 near the cliffs on the bay side in what is part of Naval Live Oaks National Seashore, described “so many ships in Pensacola Bay . . . he could have walked across the bay on the ships, if they were placed end to end.” Pensacola to Deadman’s Island is a six-mile stretch.

In 1888, Pensacola Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company, one of the largest repair facilities in the Gulf of Mexico, was built on Deadman’s Island. A short-lived venture, the facility, which repaired snapper boats, and steam and sailing vessels up to 1,500 tons, was either destroyed by a hurricane or stopped operation when metal ships began replacing wooden ones. The remnants of the steam-powered plant were converted into a glue factory by 1906, and a fertilizer plant in 1919. During its railway years, Navy Cove and Deadman’s Island became a graveyard for ships.

The island, now owned by the City of Gulf Breeze and undergoing an ecological restoration project, was once much larger than the sliver of sandy beach now visible. As the shoreline dwindles and acreage is swallowed by rising tides, archaeologists, scientists, environmentalists and volunteers work to restore it. Diminutive compared to its historic heyday, its name alone evokes an era of adventure on the high seas and ghosts of the past -- quarantined dead men and shipyard deadmen.

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Let This Scourge Pass

Marc Livanos

Dear Lord, my blessings over-flow.
Thank you for my large home,
especially in dealing with COVID-19.
(The roof is still leaking.)

Thank you for our freezer chest.
It is really dependable,
especially good for storing pizza.
(The condenser is on the fritz.)

Thank you for our health.
It is great to be asymptomatic,
especially Memaw who is still with us.
(She is at risk and needs help.)

Thank you for country music.
It is great to listen to at night,
especially the sentimental songs.
(Helps me cope with isolation.)

Thank you for lessons learned
in social distancing,
especially as I mean to do my best.
(Guidance would be nice.)

And now, I earnestly pray
with unshakable faith
for quick answers, or your intercession
to end this pandemic mess.



The Last Haircut
Susan Marie Molloy

Quarantine

John Gibson

Separate me...
...from negativity,
Anxiety, fear,
And the machinations of evil and aspiring men.

Seclude me...
...in quietude,
In succor, in comfort,
And in love.

Inoculate me...
...against angst and panic,
And if I am to be in chains,
Let me be chained to goodness,
Mercy, and service to my fellow man.

A body destroyed is a tragedy;
But a soul taken through fear is a crime against God's creation.

Viral Hurt

John Gibson

“Immuno-compromised, orphaned-at-12-by-sickness”
Sits brooding at the window,
Staring into an uncertain universe;
Anxiety rising like the
Heat wave brought on by early Spring and Summer;
Her mind a frail admixture
Of pain-stricken, doleful memories
Fueling the turmoil of today.

“Recovering, relapsing, needs-to-keep-busy”
Ambles by
In search of something to kill the idleness –
And just maybe stave off that hard-liquor demon once more.
A can of paint for that drab-colored garage,
Or a box of nails,
Anything to thwart the ol' Beam bottle.

“Immuno-compromised” bellows
That now-common refrain about “staying home” –

About “doing your part” ...and other choice daggers
Meant to drive home the point – and drive in pain.

“Recovering” is now, in earnest, recovering,
This time with the added handicap
Of weighty expectations of the masses upon him;
Vile words and hurts transferred – shared – between broken people,
Beings united by pain, and not humanity.

Phantom Freedom

John Gibson

A ghost-like bug roams,
Its float-about unknown,
And yet its every perceived move
Turns a knob in the minds of vain and aspiring men,
Which in turn tightens a figurative noose...
...around us,
...around our people,
...around our industrious acts,
...around our comings and goings,
...around our very subsistence,
...but mostly around an illusion.

Lamentably, it’s only in crisis
When you learn just how free you are not;
How in possession of your destiny you are not;
How warmly within the hearts of villains you are valued...not.

Our freedom – like the bug we call “Corona” – is phantom-like,
Its essence fading, melding...
Into and out of existence, as our death knell – and that of our liberty – materializes.

In the Kitchen with Andrea, Corona, the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Tutu Patricia Edmisten

I am preparing breakfast for my husband and myself. Today I will use the last of the milk to make *lattes*. I pack the little metal coffee container of our *espresso* machine and turn it on. While it starts to steam, I hear Andrea Bocelli on National Public Radio. He is singing *Panis Angelicus*. I am taken back to St. Anne's Catholic Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I attended Mass six mornings a week during the school year and once a week during the summer. I sang with the grade school choir comprised of seventh and eighth graders who had good grades and passable voices. One of the hymns we sang was *Panis Angelicus*, "Bread of the Angels."

As I listened to Andrea, the bagels with cream cheese and *lattes* had to wait: Tears streamed, sinuses filled, lips trembled, as longing and nostalgia commandeered my brain. Images came in torrents, images of my parents; our comfortable apartment over my grandfather's pastry shop; the grandchildren I would not see this Easter because of the virus; the families waiting on the Mexican side of the border to reach asylum; the refugees without health care on the island of Lesbos; the assault by Saudi Arabia on Yemenis; the Syrians attacked by their own president, and the mismatch between these dire times and the paucity of leadership in the United States.

Then I remembered passages from *The Book of Joy*, my partner through these early months of physical isolation. The book is essentially a dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, with writer, Douglas Abrams. The two good friends met in Dharamsala, India, the Dalai Lama's home since his epic escape from Tibet in 1959, when he and his supporters fled the invading Chinese.

In the book, the writer interviews these courageous (and mischievous) spiritual leaders about the nature of joy. How is it acquired? how does it endure, especially in the face of wide-spread suffering and injustice? How do we not despair? According to both leaders, hope is fundamental to joy. Thinking about the long struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Archbishop Tutu mused:

I say to people that I'm not an optimist, because that, in a sense, is something that depends on feelings more than the actual reality....Now hope is different in that it is based not on the ephemerality of feelings but on the firm ground of conviction. I believe with a steadfast faith that there can never be a situation that is utterly, totally hopeless. Hope is deeper and very, very close to unshakable. It's in the pit of your tummy.... To choose hope is to step firmly forward into the howling wind, baring one's chest to the elements, knowing that, in time, the storm will pass.

Seen in perspective, my personal storm is puny. Joe and I enjoy our breakfast. It is a new day. I am one of the fortunate ones.

Earth Day, 2020

Claire Massey

I roam woods nearly empty, detour to grow distance
when human voices intrude, entertain a childish notion
that Mother Nature has decided
I should not walk alone.

Is she a hobbled crone,
struggling to follow, scarred by her rages, weary from warring
for boundaries, balance?
No, not today. She's agile, young, as she moves beside me,
keen hearing fine tuned,
scanning only for subtle, primal music. If she winces, head covered
against our wailings, who could blame her?

At trail's end she pauses with hand upraised, urges
Listen.
No jet engines whining, no Ditch Witches digging,
no ocean liners churning waves of white noise.

For the first time, in a long time,
she cocks a pearled, oyster shaped ear, smiles
like Mona Lisa.

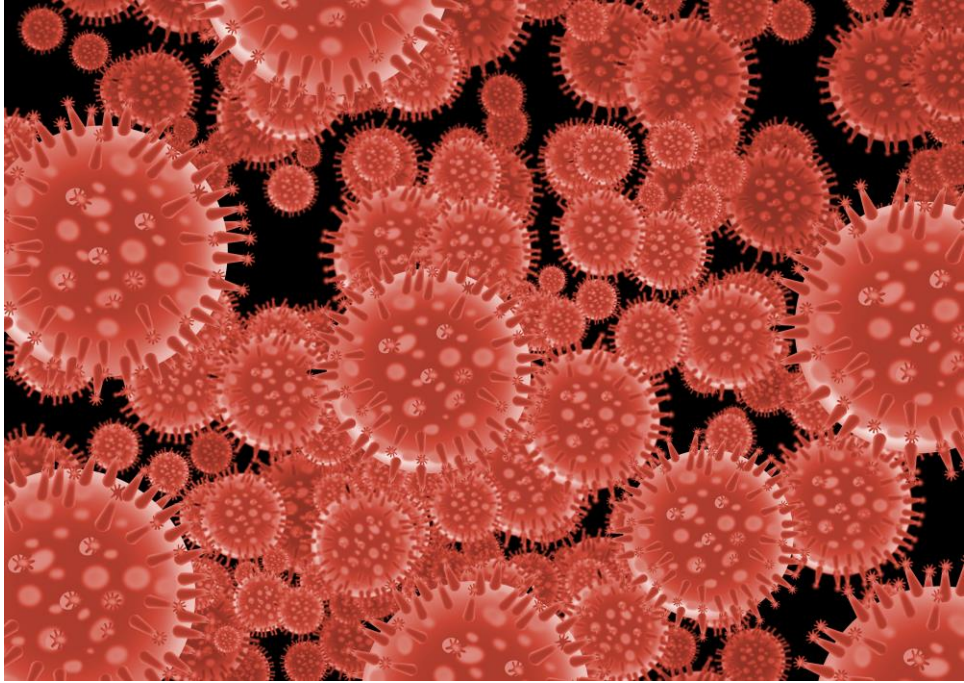
Her firstborns are singing,
the whale, the sandhill crane,
the south wind surging, ebbing,
the undammed river,
murmuring.

Old School Dream

Claire Massey

COVID-19 rages like a tyrannical
stepfather who buzz cuts his hair,
embraces wrath of God doctrine,
grounds you for the slightest infraction,
an unchaperoned date, wine on your breath,
a seconds late curfew violation.

Last night I dreamed
I was retro living
in the Age of Aquarius.
In the garden of our college commons,
my boyfriend kissed me
with unconstrained passion
while gently stoned friends smiled
at him in his surplus bell bottoms,
at me with my waterfall hair,
so abundant.



Cardinal Experience

Rachel Reese

COVID-19, a mysterious and particularly virulent form of coronavirus, has dropped into our world without warning. Few are prepared, and many are vulnerable to ill-effects that coping with quarantine has on our collective psyche.

Telecommunication platforms lure us to keep in touch. Corporate CEO's and celebrities send emails and videos saying they care, insisting 'we are all in this together.' Radio talk shows, broadcast news, and up-to-the-minute mortality counters add to the virtual noise.

I am 65 years old and considered part of COVID-19's 'at-risk' population. That means if the virus attacks, I am likely to suffer a long, miserable and messy end, squeezed to death by my own lungs. Like a throttled IV, this puts a pinch in my creative juices.

I decide to throw self-quarantine caution to the wind, grab a kitchen timer and head to the small floating deck amid the trees in my backyard to contemplate. But, *en route*, I am caught off-guard by an injured cardinal, a young female, flapping across the pebbled ground on the steam of an injured wing.

In our household, my husband is the go-to guy in the Creature Disposal Department – garden snakes, creepy-crawlers lurking in dark places, and possum squatters under the back patio all fall under Paul's jurisdiction. My role is to quietly fade into the background. Unfortunately, I am home alone, and this wounded bird at my feet unnerves me.

Where is my husband when I need him?

I'd like to state for the record I'm not totally useless in a creature crisis. After his cataract surgery, Paul was given strict instructions to refrain from bending over and to avoid sudden movements. Still, when a cockroach the size of a small dog -- whom I am certain was aware of the situation -- skittered across my foot, I instinctively turned to my husband.

But a glance at his eyepatch and the array of post-cataract drops and lotions caught me up short. So, in a split-second decision, I neutralized the threat with the bottom of my sandal and a resounding *Whack!* Jaw agape – my husband's, not the cockroach's—he said, "Wow, what a turn on!"

Meanwhile, anxiety waxing in my backyard, I give the grounded interloper a wide berth, scuttle up the platform, settle in and close my eyes. Peace is elusive. This cardinal, for whom on a daily basis I throw out seeds and replenish the bird laver with *filtered* water, continues flapping in the near distance. I am further distracted by other turmoil from the surroundings: the yard-to-yard yap of neighboring dogs, a jay that nosedives dangerously close to my face, and the grinding bearings of an ancient air conditioner.

I am at a loss as to how to tune it all out.

I take a deep breath and, though I am an infrequent petitioner to any deity, go straight to the top. I ask The Source to return tranquility to my space, giving thanks in advance, a hedge against my celestial transience. Then, I wait. And in a manner more casual than I would expect from a divine being, The Source responds with, "Get up and do something about it yourself!"

Once again, it is up to me, but hell's bells, I am not about to *touch* that cardinal. God knows -- or so my grandmother told me – birds carry germs harmful to humans, like COVID-19's cousin, avian influenza. Still, I figure there's wiggle room with this cosmic commandment.

So, I stand, and from a not-particularly-social-distance, channel energy through my hands to the distressed redwing below, then wave in the directions of the chatty canines, and enjoin the sound of that lone A/C unit on this torpid morning to cease. Then, I return to my chair, set the timer for eighteen minutes, and close my eyes.

For a brief moment, perhaps mere seconds, all is quiet.

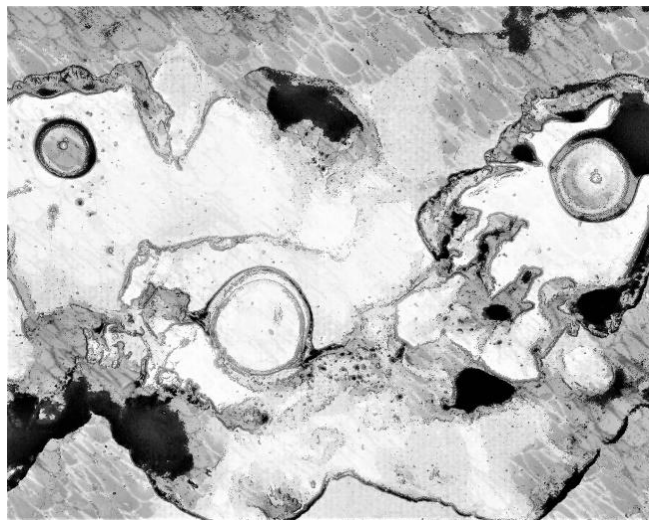
And there, in the midst of clattery urban nature, I know I can loosen the grip that constraints have on my creativity, even if said nature turns up the volume -- which it does. Still, my mind meanders in directions it wants to go, though I don't recall exactly where. But amid the wanderings, I experience gleanings of more interesting—more joyful—places in this empyrean atlas. Then, a wondrous thing happens. I start to cry. Not a blubbing outpouring; rather, a gentle stream, which washes away my anxiety.

When the timer rings, I offer a closing prayer, and open my eyes.

The cardinal has flown away.

Chronicle of Fools
April 2020
Ryn Holmes

Blinds raised inches from the sill reveal
legs ambling past the cuckoo's nest,
solo jeans and shorts a-stroll
preamble to a game of chance –
absolute risk the ultimate gamble
in unpeopled silence.
The king regnant in cap and bells
tricks the crowd,
gatherers of sticks and stones.
Unburied bones
shift in twilight, drift,
to fall away.
Trust is an enormous no.
In this new age unpent
fear spreads like water,
village idiots ignore common sense,
hope for miracles, for a past returning
predictable familiarities of the gone-by.
Taunting the hungry hunter,
they fall, wait for the fever
the cough
the breathless wonder of death
the slow turn to dust
that brings a final good night.



COVID-19

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The Passage of Time

Susan Marie Molloy

A week or five ago, in a nameless month, on an otherwise nondescript day, I slipped my car into a parking spot after rolling through the lot for a length of time.

The featureless grey sky distracted me as I pulled my shopping list from my jeans pocket.

Vinegar

Iodized salt

Rye bread

Udon noodles

Salami

I strolled towards the store, dodging globs of purple and green on the asphalt. Some looked like fingers splayed and twisted; some were just crumpled lumps. Flat white tissues flapped their corners against the curb in the breeze, signaling me to enter.

The doors glided open. I reached for a grocery cart, just as a masked man in a dark green apron cut in front of me and wiped the plastic handle with a white wet tissue that he yanked from a canister. Wipe, wipe, and one more wipe with a flourish, he kicked the cart towards me with his foot and nodded that it was ready to use.

I lifted my eyebrows and raised my head to witness a horde of strangely outfitted people pushing their carts, dodging one another. Most wore green or blue masks or shabby rags across their faces, many sported green or purple gloves, all were disengaged, and no one spoke.

The deli counter was my first stop. A line of blue drywall tape marked where I could not cross. A paper sign ordered me to wait to be served; that the server would approach me.

“Can I help you?”

“Pound o’ salami.”

The server yanked the link from the case, furiously sliced off a pound, weighed it, wrapped it, and slammed it on the counter.

“Anything else?”

“No, ma’am,” and I leaned in nimbly towards the deli case, my toes still firmly fixed behind the blue tape that I dared not cross.

More blue tape directed me which way to walk in the aisles. Arrows pointed his way to the udon noodles – no, *this* way – do not enter, but enter *here*. Follow the arrow, obey the all-powerful forbidding X.

The udon noodles hid behind the chow mein noodles, which in turn hid behind dented cans of bamboo shoots – a confusion of products on partially empty shelves.

The salt sat in an aisle that boasted a glut of nuts and canned fruits, valiantly shared with empty flour and sugar shelves. I seized the Morton salt as a man in a mask and flesh-colored gloves glared and sized me up as he marched by.

I chuckled and plodded ahead, pushing my cart and dodging several people in the aisle who theatrically hugged the shelves as we passed each other.

A cold female voice droned from above.

“Wash your hands. Be courteous to your fellow shoppers. We are in this together. Thank you for following these guidelines.”

There was no rye bread, nothing on the bread shelves but old, beat-up paper signs commanding shoppers to take only one loaf, and *thank you for your understanding during these difficult times*.

Last on my list was vinegar. Back to that aisle – do not enter here, but enter *here, this way!* and I obeyed the blue taped arrows and x's on the floor. The last jug went into my cart.

I made a beeline towards the checkout lines, seeing people heading my way down the aisle, abruptly stopping and swiftly turning around to go down another, hopefully empty, aisle. It was all so peculiar, this apparent fear of contact, these strange fashion accessories, the disembodied voice from above.

“Practice social distancing. Be thoughtful to all. Wash your hands. Thank you for following these guidelines.”

I zigzagged my way to a checkout line, sighed, and leaned against my cart's handle. A woman wearing yellow Playtex gloves up to her elbows and a doubled-up mask, shrieked.

“Six feet apart! Stay away from me! Six feet apart! The virus! This is 2020!”

She made an impressive Electric Slide move away from me, all the while glaring and clutching her shopping basket.

Something cold and wet poked my neck.

I turned and focused my eyes.

My dog poked my neck again, and I sat up on the couch.

A small, garlicky burp reminded me of my salami and rye bread sandwich snack. I smiled and got up.

I turned the television channel and settled for a new episode of *Fantasy Island*. This was 1984, for Heaven's sake, not 2020.

And I sprayed a bit of Lysol in the living room air for good measure.

Meditations on the Coronavirus

Carolyn Tokson

I know those streets in New York where the hospitals are, where the refrigerated trailers stand. I know right where the synagogue is where the first outbreak in New Rochelle was. The same refrigerated trailers are a few blocks away from my daughter's apartment in Philly. My granddaughter's friend Erin, a nurse in Denver, wears masks that have been used by other nurses and hung up as they leave their shifts. I've already lost a friend here in Pensacola to the virus, one in Ohio, one in NY. I know others who have lost mothers, aunts. This virus is very real to me. I have major allergies, asthma and lungs that have seen one too many bouts with bronchitis and pneumonia. From the first day I read about the new coronavirus in the *NY Times*, I knew it would come for us.

I've studied enough existentialism and Zen to hold the idea of life and death closely. I washed the bodies of my dead husband and my dead mother. I know what it's like for death to sit in a chair and wait quietly while we say our goodbyes. And I know how to survive in its wake. I don't want it to come for me. Not yet. So, right away I made a plan.

My partner and I will be on "stay-at-home" for the duration. We stocked up on food and necessities early, but they do run out, don't they? We go to the grocery on the day for seniors, to the pharmacy and out for walks. I do zazen (meditation), I sew masks, and I cook. That's my plan to keep my spirits up and my life on track.

I already had disposable masks, but they are like currency now. The nuns at the Buddhist temple here in Pensacola know me and they sent me a pattern. I sew masks and give them away. When I couldn't keep up with the need, the nuns met me at the gate and gave me a bag of masks. When I gave those away, they gave me more. I have different patterns now; I can make various sizes. For me, it's important to make the masks.

In the zendos I've attended in New York, Massachusetts, California and Hawaii, we always chant the Four Vows for All. The first is "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them." My teacher's translation is "to carry them over." It is what we do each time we have a service. It's a vow that I take seriously so I make masks. I'm not a nurse or a doctor. It's the least I can do.

And I cook. That task I love. It is like a drug to me. The reading of the recipe, the chopping, the measuring, the sautéing, the stirring. It's an act of meditation, a sweet suspension of reality. We eat our main meal in the middle of the day with candlelight, the silver and the good dishes, and sometimes wine. We ignore the sewing machine at the far end of the dining room table. We have a small house; we have to set up project areas.

I have made many new recipes and I've catalogued them in the small book where I usually write the meals we have prepared for guests or for parties. I've made almost all the recipes in the vegetable section of Ina Garten's *Barefoot in Paris*. Paris to me is the center of the world; I know the Left Bank like a family member. So I thrill to her recipes. Her vegetable *tian* with zucchini, tomatoes, onions and potatoes was superb. The cauliflower gratin I paired with her sautéed mushrooms, the leftovers with her French green beans which have onions and red peppers added in. From an old French cookbook, I tried *Veau Marengo* which was as delicious as any meal from a top-notch restaurant. Another day I made *salade au riz au saucisson*, a lovely cold meal. My French tomato salad is a staple and I'm making all my own dressings. Tonight we had the Croque Monsieur. For Italian, I grab either Julia della Croce's or Lydia Bastianich's cookbooks and head to the pasta section. I love watching the anchovies dissolve into the olive oil for a sauce

with broccoli. Life goes on. We are surviving and sometimes thriving in this strange new world. I savor the quiet and the slowness. We miss my friends. But we are alive!



Passage of Time
Susan Marie Molloy

Mardi Gras Queen Lucie Wade

Blaring trumpets announced Pensacola's 2020 Mardi Gras Coronation Ball. Members of the royal court marched in, stopping six feet in front of the stage. The crowd went wild when King Penzakola appeared, bowing and waving to his subjects. He ascended the steps to the royal throne and faced the audience. Next to his throne a gilded table held a crown and scepter emblazoned with rubies and sapphires to be presented to the queen at her coronation.

Trumpets blared again as a spotlight focused on curtains parting at the back of the stage. A silver-masked, statuesque woman in a spectacular red sequined gown appeared. Her ruby and sapphire earrings dangling below ebony tresses matched the jeweled crown and scepter. The orchestra struck up "Hail to the Queen" while this shining vision slowly paraded across the stage to kneel at the foot of King Penzakola's throne.

The king removed her mask, lifted the bejeweled crown, and gently placed it on her head. Once it was firmly in place, he carefully handed her the jewel-spiked scepter, and helped the newly crowned queen to her feet. The ear-splitting yells faded as the king raised his hands demanding silence.

"Meet Miss Corona Virus our 2020 Mardi Gras Queen," he shouted. "She arrived at Pensacola International Airport this morning after a trip around the world. She's visited China, South Korea, Russia, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, leaving her essence wherever she's visited. Let's give her a royal welcome."

Queen Corona bowed and waved her scepter high, sprinkling ruby-red and sapphire-blue sparkles over the crowd below.

King Penzakola took Queen Corona's hand and escorted her down to the dance floor. The orchestra began to play as the royal couple stepped onto the floor, and the princes and princesses joined them for the first dance. When it ended, the king and queen led the court through the ballroom entrance where royal floats awaited. Once they had taken their places, the Mardi Gras Grand Parade officially got underway.

The parade stopped at the intersection of Palafox and Garden Streets in front of bleachers where city officials and honored guests burst into applause. Mayor Grover climbed onto the royal float, and with a deep bow to Queen Corona, presented her with an oversized golden key to the city. "Queen Corona, our city is yours now. May your reign bring prosperity to our fair town."

Queen Corona put down her scepter and held the key up high as the crowd cheered. With the key in one hand and the microphone in the other, Queen Corona addressed the crowd:

I'm the queen of Pensacola assuming my rule

You'll find that I am not your fool.

I'm giving you something you may never have seen

It's commonly known as a quarantine.

Don't leave your house unless it's necessary
To buy food at the store or pills at the apothecary.
You're to wear a mask whenever you're out
For this order do not have a doubt
Because if you decide to disobey
It's with your life that you will pay.

With an evil smile, Queen Corona waved her scepter toward the Pensacola Civic Band, signaling them to continue the parade.

To the tune of "When the Saints Go Marching In," the royal float glided past throngs of revelers lining South Palafox Street. Smiling broadly, the queen waved her scepter high, spraying ruby-red and sapphire-blue glitter throughout the city. At midnight the parade ended at De Luna Landing overlooking moonlit Pensacola Bay. Queen Corona stepped down from the royal float, tripped on the hem of her dress, and stumbled to the ground. As she fell, the crown flew from her head into the air, and landed around the neck of an airborne pelican. The bejeweled bird was last seen flying east over the Pensacola Bay Bridge. When Queen Corona reached up for her crown, she let go of her scepter, only to watch it fall over the landing and into the Bay where it has never been found.

The 2020 Mardi Gras Grand Parade ended that night, but the spirit of Queen Corona Virus lingers on. On nights when Pensacola Bay's moonlit water is tinted ruby-red and sapphire-blue, could this be the reflection of Queen Corona's bejeweled crown and scepter? And when the moon is full, the cloud-like figure of a tall graceful woman can be seen hovering over Pensacola Bay. Could this be Queen Corona searching for her bejeweled crown and scepter?



When Hammock Becomes Mask
Karen McAferty Morris

The Myrtle

Karen McAferty Morris

The three of them grew up together like cousins,
the pine, live oak, and myrtle, planted in a cluster
filling the sky and shading the path down to the dock
and little bayou, and I loved how the myrtle's three trunks
rose and leaned out fluttering slender pointed-leaved branches
like someone lifting arms to show the view.

Cut off from gatherings, galleries, restaurants, and shops
during quarantine, we encamped on the back porch
through the mild, breezy weekend afternoons, savoring
good wine and soft blues, observing the birds and changing tides,
discussing current events, reminiscing, making and adjusting
plans, watching the sun set. With just the two of us,
the focus was on each other, like sunlight through a skylight,
a pure brightness. We know we are among the lucky ones.
We won't be seeing Lake Como this summer after all,
or Copenhagen. Others have lost their lives, livelihoods, still
labor in dangerous circumstances to heal, connect, and nourish.

The myrtle had died slowly over the last few years.
Its blanched, bare branches looked pitiful, an affront
to its former beauty. I finally admitted it was time. In an hour
it was gone, pieces thudding down hard except when prickly
vines threading through its branches into the other trees
made us pull hard, like they were trying to hold on.

The sky was emptier, but the view more open. Lush new
stems were rising thick from the ground near the old trunks,
promises of fragrant blossoms some year, some spring.

A relief, a balm, to think once again we'll see the myrtle
rise strong, the tree planted on Aphrodite's temple grounds,
and in Isaiah the one prophesized to replace the briar.

Ghost of COVID-19

Katherine Nelson-Born

I thought my house haunted once,
heavy sighs on a winter's night
waking me. Now, the death count
rises like waters lapping up land.
Smell of bleach assaults my senses daily.
I cannot touch myself—or you—
my love an infection.
Singed by spring sunshine,
my face burns above
the mask that does not stop
the march of Covid-19.

New ghosts appear in the moon's glow,
angry moans drifting across the breeze--
“And still you worship at the altar of greed.”

A shroud replaces the mask.
I did not save you from the virus let loose
in vanished jungles, set free
to cross overheated seas,
infecting millions more.

Like Lady Macbeth,
I cannot wash my hands enough
to cleanse my house of its specters.
At midnight's chime, tortured spirits
lean in. Pinpricked,
my fingertip blooms too late
the antibodies that could have saved you.

Life in the Time, Again, of Pandemic

Tom Roberts

Though the nearly deserted streets of my Florida town are from a modern pandemic, they remind me that many powerful ancient empires were humbled by plague and disease, often with lasting effects on their society.

The Plague of Athens was an epidemic that devastated the city-state of Athens during the Peloponnesian War (430 BCE) and killed nearly 100,000 people, twenty-five percent of the population. It entered through Piraeus, the city's port and sole source of wartime supplies.

Athens' main enemy, Sparta, was a land-based power, able to field unbeatable land armies. Fearing the Spartan power, the Athenians, under the direction of Pericles, retreated within Athens' city walls, using maritime supremacy for supply while its superior navy harassed Spartan troop movements. Unfortunately, this plan caused massive migration from the local countryside into the already crowded city-state, generating close quarters and leading to resource shortages. Add in the era's poor hygiene, and Athens became a breeding ground for disease and horrible death.

Upon seeing the smoke and smelling the stench from the burning funeral pyres of Athens, the Spartans withdrew their troops, unwilling to risk contact with the diseased enemy.

The historian Thucydides, himself a survivor of this Athenian pandemic, writes of a disease originating in Ethiopia and arriving in Greece via Egypt and Libya, a heretofore unknown plague of severe and deadly consequences.

The plague affected Athens' society. Its citizens, fearful of what might happen to them next, became indifferent to every rule of law or religion. The government countered with stricter laws with severe punishments. It didn't help Pericles, the leader of Athens, who contracted and died from the plague.

Centuries later, the Antonine Plague arose from another war as mighty Rome fought the Parthians, who had invaded Roman territory in Armenia. Ancient sources write that the epidemic appeared during the Roman siege of Seleucia in the winter of 165 CE. It jumped to troops in Gaul before spreading to the great city of Rome. There, it claimed the life of Lucius Verus, who died in 169 CE and was the co-emperor with Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, after whom the plague is named. Marcus Aurelius, last of the Five Good Emperors, would later write the classic *Meditations*, which embodied Stoic philosophy and spirituality and is still revered as a literary monument to a government of service and duty.

In 166 CE, the Greek physician Galen traveled to his home in Asia Minor to observe the outbreak and returned to Rome in 168 CE, summoned by the emperors. He describes the disease as long-lasting with symptoms of fever, diarrhea, vomiting, thirstiness, swollen throat, and coughing and accompanied by dry and pustular lesions on the skin.

At its peak, the Antonine Plague caused up to two thousand deaths a day in Rome, with a mortality rate of about twenty-five percent. The total deaths were close to five million, and the disease killed entire villages and devastated the Roman army.

Like the current pandemic, it is thought that the disease originated in Han Dynasty China, brought west by caravans treading the Silk Road and by sailors plying the lucrative trade routes of the Indian Ocean and points east.

The severe devastation to the Roman Empire's population from the pandemic may indicate that people had no previous exposure to it. It did have one positive effect—immunity for its survivors. The plague affected Roman culture and literature. In their fear, many citizens turned

away from common sense and turned to magic, often writing cryptic sayings over the doorways of their homes. Such warding often became the homeowner's epitaphs.

Marcus Aurelius would later write during the war famously portrayed in the movie *Gladiator* that the pestilence around him was less deadly than falsehood, evil behavior, and ignorance.

Ironically, the Antonine Plague faded in 180 CE, the same year Marcus Aurelius died. On his deathbed, he uttered the words, "Weep not for me; think rather of the pestilence and the deaths of so many others." Perhaps the ancient warning against ignorance, lies, and lawlessness will be heard in the present. Perhaps Aurelius' words of duty and service, so epitomized by hospital doctors and nurses, first responders, and other essential workers will inspire our government and all of us to persevere through to the end of COVID-19 and to life beyond the time of coronavirus.

5/05/2020: The year of the virus
Mary Gutierrez

The earth has a secret,
one that she is now sharing with the world.
She has the power to change our future,
She has the power to change her fate,
she has all along.

A monster of our own making has been released,
and with an instant it has altered the human species forever.
Consuming and restricting our lives,
just as we have restricted hers
with air pollution and deforestation.

Lives lost; sacrifices made,
pointing the finger everywhere but at ourselves.
Even during these times of change, it is profits over people,
it is individual rights, over human rights.

People are sleeping, afraid to wake to a new world awaiting us.

4/05/2020: Resurrection
Mary Gutierrez

It's been a little over a month since the World Health Organization officially called COVID-19 a pandemic. Since then people have become divided on whether it's a real pandemic or an elaborate hoax. I believe this division has nothing to do with expressing one's opinion or beliefs, but it has everything to do with lack of education. And I'm not talking about whether someone went to college or not. I'm talking about educating yourself on an issue with unbiased information – science before politics. I guess it's just human behavior to jump on one band wagon or another. Personally, I choose not to get lost in drama or misinformation.

While this might seem strange to some, I have no fear about what is happening now. Whatever is going to happen will happen. I believe this pandemic is the earth fighting back, and this perfect and beautiful system requires her inhabitants to live with her—not against her. I have never understood why we humans think that that we own earth and can control her. We don't, we can't, and we never will. She will *always* win. She produces hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and viruses. Too many of us are depleting her resources, not allowing her time to heal. She is the one reducing the virus that's destroying her, and that virus is us. It's biology and science; I accept this harsh reality. I will watch as she runs her course, and if she calls me to join her, so be it. I've spent the majority of my life fighting to protect her, and I will continue to do so until I am absorbed into her.

However, I am more than just a scientist--I am also a spiritual being aware of the intimate relationship we share with the earth. She is my church. She holds the creator within her, just as we do. The creator lives in the land, the air, the water and in other species--plant and animal. As we destroy the earth, we destroy the creator and ultimately ourselves. The earth is now fighting for all us.

The Mask III

Jane Lies

My eyes sparkle with joy
at the sight
of an old friend
recognizing me.

Nothing has changed
except my choice of
clothes.

A mask now
hides a portion
of my face.

My smile is gone,
hidden.

I remain confident the
virus will pass,
and I can smile with you
and enjoy life again.

I am me and will always be me
creative, positive, hopeful,
in a world where fear resides.

When my disguise
is no longer needed
and the challenge is dismissed,
my soul will be stronger
more loving
and grateful for the new life.

Halted

Lori Zavada

During the pandemic,
A dam broke and hearts stood still,

Funerals were halted,
Hugging was halted,
Celebrations were halted,
Gigs were halted,
Jobs were halted,

Life was a rusty gear,
That's when you died,
Just went to sleep and didn't wake up,

Your dear friend wrote a tribute,
We penned the virtual petition,
Maybe a monument will keep you alive,
You sang a river,
And we are forever changed,
Eight feet this side of you,

Crouched in our nooks behind masks,
We are distracted by life and death,
Pandemic or not we know we won't be spared,

But if we listen we can follow the melody.

Behind the Mask

Beale Carter

I would love to go back to days that have passed
before days of voices muffled behind cotton masks.
Back when folks knew if it was the current day or the last,
when days on the calendar didn't pass so fast.
Times when greeting a friend wasn't a task.

I remember when going to the beach was a treat.
There were no signs "Keep back at least six feet."
I recall a day when I could go to my favorite spot to eat
Now I have to pick up my food on the street.
Will we ever go back to hugging each other
and kisses on the cheek?
I have no way of knowing, but it looks pretty bleak.

And what about all this self- isolation?
Will at least one of my kids walk at their graduation?
know what it is like to hang with their peers,
Instead of living every day with bottled-up fear,
Not knowing if this person or that is infected,
wondering whose symptoms went undetected.

The whole world is in a strict quarantine.
I have to think there must be a grander scheme
2020 has played out like a horror movie scene.
The whole world threatened by COVID-19.

Author Biographies

Bob Ave's short story "Sprinkler" was published in *The Hurricane Review* in 2013. He was born in Miami in 1969. Currently, he is a nursing home social worker. He has his own private investigations firm. Previously, he spent nearly 20 years as a protective investigator for Department of Children and Family Services. Before that he was a social studies teacher at Pine Forest High School.

Katherine Nelson-Born, writer and editor, grew up in New Orleans, the setting for her soon-to-be-published debut YA novel, *Before the Thunder*. Read her novel's award-winning introductory chapter excerpt in the 2020 *Seven Hills Review* on Amazon.com or find more poems in her 2016 Finishing Line Press chapbook, *When Mockingbirds Sing*.

Beale Carter is a thirty-seven-year-old father of three beautiful kids, a U.S. Air Force veteran, and an aspiring entrepreneur. He loves exploring nature, cooking, all kinds of music and, of course, writing.

Charlotte Crane is a former business editor and columnist for *Pensacola News Journal* and a former Northwest Florida correspondent for *Florida Trend* magazine. She has a bachelor's and a master's degree in journalism from University of Wisconsin. Published works include poetry and short stories, a family memoir, a history of Pensacola Habitat for Humanity and a book of short fiction entitled *The Tales of Aunt Maddy*.

Patricia Edmisten is retired from the University of West Florida where she directed the office of International Education and Programs. Her two years in Peru as a Peace Corps volunteer influenced the direction of her life. She is a social justice activist and the author of eight books. www.patriciaedmistenbooks.com

John Gibson is the author of three novels: *Patriot Victory*, *Painkiller*, and *Soul Sprints* – the latter of which won the Grand Prize in the 2018 Words Matter Publishing Holiday Book Contest; and one work of poetry, titled *Arduous Vales*. You can learn more about him and his work at <https://johnwgibsonauthor.com>; and find him on Facebook ("John W. Gibson, Author").

Mary Gutierrez is an Environmental Scientist and Founder and Director of Earth Ethics and Earth Action. A poet, her first book *Naked in the Rain* was published in 2012. Several individual pieces have appeared in numerous zines and magazines over the years. Check out www.marytheauthor.com to learn more.

In her eighth decade, award-winning poet and mixed-media photographer **Ryn Holmes** originated from the bottom and top of California before finding her way to the Florida Gulf Coast. She is a partner in K & K Writing Services, co-editor of *Panoply* ezine; her written work and visual art have appeared in galleries as well as print and online journals.

Christina Larson taught psychology for UWF, was a first female paramedic, FPA president, peace summit delegate in Vienna, Censored Stories award recipient, speaker for APA 1997,

keynote in Nürnberg 2000, and Chautauqua 2006. Writings include *Sculpting A Vision in Metal, Stone, and Words* and *Marty is Dead*.

Raised in Mobile, **Jane Lies** is a member of National League of American Pen Women and is published in *Nobis* and *Poems of the Super Moon*. Jane Lives in Pensacola with her husband, Bill, and her English Springer Spaniel, Dickens.

Marc Livanos is retired and lives in Milton, FL. His poetry appears in *Sheepshead Review*, *Straylight Magazine*, *The Merrimack Review*, *Glass Mountain – Shards*, *POEM*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Old Red Kimono*, *Ship of Fools*, *Foliolate Oak Literary Magazine*, *The Penmen Review*, *Wordeater*, *Artifact Nouveau*, *KCCC E-Journal* and *Blackwater Literary Journal*.

Claire Massey is Poet Laureate for Pensacola Pen Women. She served on the editorial board of the *Emerald Coast Review* in 2019. In 2020, she has work appearing or forthcoming in *Persimmon Tree*, *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Dead Mule*, and *Panoply*.

By day, **Ethan McGuire** is a healthcare information technology professional. By night, he is a writer, whose writing has been published by *The Dark Sire Literary Magazine*, *Better Than Starbucks Poetry Magazine*, *Vita Brevis Press*, and others. He currently lives in the Florida Panhandle with his wife, dog, and cat.

Susan Marie Molloy is a retired analyst and published author. Growing up in a bilingual family helped foster her love of languages and nurture an interest in exploring other cultures. In addition to writing poetry and short stories, she enjoys Pre-Code films, photography, music, travelling, and reading.

Karen McAferty Morris is Poetry Editor of the National League of American Pen Women's magazine *The Pen Woman*. Her chapbook *Elemental* was published in April 2018, followed by *Confluence* in May 2020, both of which were awarded first place in the NLAPW's Vinnie Ream Competition in Poetry.

As a writer of Americana literature, **Rachel Reeses's** stories are centered around characters with distinct voices, stories for which something or someone has something to say. When not taking dictation from her characters, you might find Rachel speaking in their voices at open mic venues, performing among companionable poets and other prose-ists in the Florida Panhandle and the South.

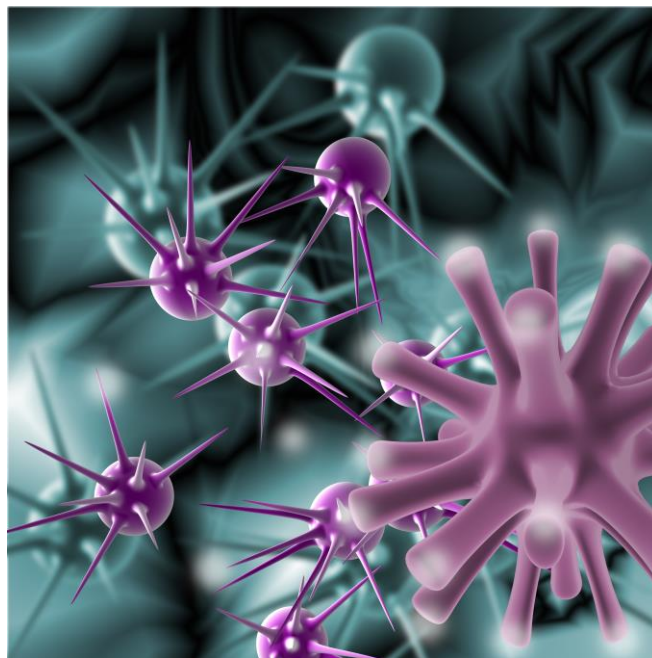
Tom Roberts is the author of *Lost Scrolls of Archimedes*, a historical novel, and winner of a 2019 Royal Palm Literary Award for historical fiction from the Florida Writers Association. A software engineer in a previous life, Mr. Roberts began writing in 2017.

Diane Skelton's work has appeared in *The English Journal*, *Mississippi Magazine*, *Mississippi Genealogy*, *Gulf Breeze News*, *Florida Hockey Life*, *The Legend*, *Emerald Coast Review* and various professional publications. From her home in Gulf Breeze, she writes the blog, thegumbodiaries. She has published two books, *The Gumbo Diaries: Mississippi and Beyond* (2015) and *Thank You for Asking* (2020).

Carolyn Joyce Tokson is a retired learning facilitator who has had poems published in an anthology on the Holocaust, *Rural Heritage* magazine, *The Hartford Courant*, children's reading texts, and various small publications. She is also an editor/writer for the *Jazz Pensacola* newsletter. She is a chef extraordinaire.

Native Pensacolian **Lucie Watson Wade** enjoyed a career in public relations and social services as Florida's District One Foster Parent Recruiter and Outreach Coordinator for the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Her articles were published in *Pensacola News Journal*, *Gulf Coast Parent*, and *Gulf Coast Women's News*. She continues her dedication to child advocacy as a member of Children in Crisis, Inc. Board of Directors, and is currently working on a memoir and playing tennis.

Lori Zavada is a writer for a local behavioral health organization and a graduate of the University of West Florida. Her work has been featured in *Pensacola News Journal* and *USA Today*. Her stories are published in the *Emerald Coast Review*, *Tallahassee Family* and *Bella* magazines. Visit her at lorizavada.com.



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