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## Poetic Representations of COVID-19 Narratives: An Exploration of Emotional Experiences During the Pandemic

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### Abstract

In pivotal moments of history like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to attend to and preserve the stories of different people experiencing the same phenomenon in their own ways. This project analyzed the public's emotional experiences during the pandemic using methods of narrative and poetic inquiry. After reading 105 entries from the *Pandemic Journaling Project*, an online platform where people anonymously published journal entries reflecting on their pandemic experiences, narratives were categorized based on ten prominent emotional themes: anger, anxiety, fatigue, fear, loneliness, longing, loss, loss of control, stress, and uncertainty. Found poems were constructed for each emotion using words and phrases from the entries listed under each category, inserting poetic elements of structure, shape, and rhythm. By framing the project around emotion, the feelings aroused by the pandemic are brought forth in an evocative manner for consideration, interrogation, and presentation.

### Keywords

storytelling, found poetry, pandemic, narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry

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In pivotal moments of history like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to attend to and preserve the stories of different people experiencing the same phenomenon in their own ways. This project analyzed the public's emotional experiences during the pandemic using methods of narrative and poetic inquiry. After reading 105 entries from the *Pandemic Journaling Project*, an online platform where people anonymously published journal entries reflecting on their pandemic experiences, narratives were categorized based on ten prominent emotional themes: anger, anxiety, fatigue, fear, loneliness, longing, loss, loss of control, stress, and uncertainty. Found poems were constructed for each emotion using words and phrases from the entries listed under each category, inserting poetic elements of structure, shape, and rhythm. By framing the project around emotion, the feelings aroused by the pandemic are brought forth in an evocative manner for consideration, interrogation, and presentation.

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The global tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the abrupt restructuring of society, defining this poignant period of history. Although nearly every human on earth experienced the pandemic, it is important to recognize that each individual's experience varied widely. Statistics provide a limited perspective on the pandemic's impact on people's daily lives; however, people's stories reveal how humanity coped with this invisible enemy. An exploration of narratives produced during the pandemic provides a window into human experience beyond the maps and statistical graphs so commonly used to represent the pandemic.

The last few decades have produced a surge in research in the medical humanities, particularly the field of narrative medicine. Narrative medicine places a spotlight on patient stories, offering a more humanistic understanding of illness (Charon, 2008). Narratives have the capacity to express the complexity of human experience, making them particularly valuable when examining health crises. At the same time, studying narratives necessitates an acknowledgement that they can be messy, incomplete, contradictory, and chaotic (Harter et al., 2005). While narrative medicine was initially thought of as a clinical tool, it has more recently become a mechanism for patient and community activism (Davidson & Cusanno, 2022). As people tell their own stories of health, illness, and wellness, they may push back against the canonical medical stories produced in clinical spaces. In this way, narrative is a means of reclaiming the patient story, or perhaps simply the human story, from institutional biomedicine.

This project aimed to harness the spirit of narrative medicine to reclaim the stories of ordinary individuals living through the pandemic from the dominant, and sometimes overbearing, biomedical perspective. We sought to understand and subsequently reconvey the emotional experiences of the public during this time of crisis through the qualitative methodologies of narrative and poetic inquiry. While statistics may have prevailed in the short-

term, stories and poetry tend to persist from generation to generation. We hope that future generations will consider these representations as evidence of the human experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Background: Narrative and Poetic Inquiry**

Narrative and poetic inquiry are two methods of qualitative research that focus on understanding the human experience. Storytelling is a natural human activity common across cultures and consistent throughout human history. Stories shape the way people interact in personal relationships and with society and culture as a whole (Bingley et al., 2008). In fact, Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm considers storytelling the chief sense-making mechanism of humankind. Researchers bring this natural activity under the lens in narrative inquiry methodology, often adopting approaches such as structural analysis (Butina, 2015), thematic analysis, grounded theory, and narrative analysis (Floersch et al., 2010) to enhance their understanding of both the content and structure of a story. Narrative as a form of inquiry (Richardson, 1994) allows narrative writers to explore their understanding of their own experiences through the act of writing.

Poetic inquiry, which focuses on the re-telling of stories in a poetic medium, allows the researcher to engage with the narrative in a different, deeper form and share that depth with other readers (Davidson, 2021; Wu, 2021). Poems convey complex ideas (Prendergast & Galvin, 2012) and evoke emotion, which are defining elements of the human experience (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Furman, 2007; Hoben & Pickett, 2018; Richardson, 2011). This creates and nurtures empathy within the writer and the reader of the poem and allows for the analysis and understanding of different perspectives (Vincent, 2018). The transformation of interview responses into poetry is a reputed method in qualitative research to highlight important themes and perspectives (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1992, 1994). Found poetry is a specific type of poetry where the words and phrases that constitute the poem are taken from existing text sources (Butler-Kisber, 2002). Using found poetry with existing narratives is an insightful approach to better understanding human experiences.

Narrative and poetic inquiry allow researchers to study lived experiences and empathize with those experiences. Together, narratives and poetry help researchers understand, share, and create meaning out of the human experience. Although the world was inundated with quantitative data during the pandemic in the forms of COVID maps, case reports, wave charts, vaccine effectiveness rates, hospitalization capacity reports, and a myriad of other statistics followed religiously by the masses, including these authors, the human experience cannot be understood or represented by even the most sophisticated mass numerical data. Furthermore, divisions that emerged during the pandemic were centered around data reliability and policy change implementation without acknowledging the experience and emotions shared across policy divides.

This project bridges the methodologies of narrative and poetic inquiry to form a unique combined approach to assessing the direct and indirect personal impacts of the pandemic. This approach allows not only for the understanding of the human experience via analysis of authentic primary sources but also a purposeful re-expression of these individual sentiments in a collective voice. This re-expression in the form of found poetry allows for a timeless, concise, and direct way to understand the emotional experiences of people who lived during the pandemic for both current and future generations to come.

At the time of completing this project, the first author was an undergraduate student seeking to fulfill her undergraduate thesis requirement. She sought to use this opportunity as a way to explore a field beyond her premedical studies and capture the pivotal time period through which she and others around her were living. The second author, a health

communication scholar with experience in narrative, autoethnographic, and poetic inquiry, served as thesis chair and mentor. Together, we took on this project with an attitude of curiosity and discovery. One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, we had grown accustomed to the ambiguity of our world, making it easier to be open to whatever the data presented.

## Method

### Project Summary

This project used the methods of narrative and poetic inquiry to communicate the depth and breadth of people's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The narrative inquiry phase included finding, reading, coding, and categorizing the entries from the *Pandemic Journaling Project* (PJP), an online platform where people responded to weekly journal prompts about their pandemic experiences (*The Pandemic Journaling Project*, 2020). The poetic inquiry phase focused on the curation of the chosen entries through a poetic medium. The first author constructed each poem from multiple entries in each category developed in the narrative inquiry phase.

### Choosing the Entries

During the pandemic, many people turned to creative writing endeavors to reflect on and share their lived experiences (Markham & Harris, 2021; Lahman et al., 2021; Wyatt, 2021; Lee, 2021). The PJP was one such platform which allowed the public to express their daily experiences by responding to formulated prompts (*The Pandemic Journaling Project*, 2020). The primary motivations behind using the PJP included the large number of publicly available entries, the anonymity of the writers, and the ability to filter entries by prompt. Participants responded to the prompts with either text, photos, audio clips, or a combination of those mediums. This project used text-only entries since the aim was to construct poems from rich textual sources. The entry dates ranged from June of 2020 to May of 2021, and all entries responded to the following prompt: "How is the coronavirus pandemic affecting your life right now? Tell us about your experiences, feelings, and thoughts" (*The Pandemic Journaling Project*, 2020). The broad prompt offered writers the opportunity to discuss a wide variety of topics in their entries, thus providing a rich set of entries to read and analyze. Chosen entries were at least a paragraph long to allow for a substantial perspective to be analyzed.

### Reading the Entries

In total, the first author compiled 105 entries for the project. This was a subset of the total number of featured entries on the website, all selected to meet the criteria of the project, discussed above. While reading the entries, remaining open-minded and surrendering to the themes the entry writers presented allowed for the discovery of new ideas and perspectives while categorizing. Utilizing this "surrender and catch" approach (Prendergast, 2015) allowed for a faithful analysis of the stories and what the authors hope to be an appropriate presentation of them rather than forcing them to fit preconceived notions of the pandemic.

By using a combination of grounded theory and thematic analysis (Floersch et al., 2010) to categorize the entries, common themes surfaced, into which the entries naturally fell. Thematic analysis is an approach widely used in qualitative research, where different patterns are identified across a data set (Floersch et al., 2010). Grounded theory takes thematic analysis a step further by identifying how the different themes are connected (Floersch et al., 2010). The first author employed thematic analysis while reading each individual entry, coding for topics

discussed within the entry, such as “anger,” “childcare,” and “vaccines.” After reading all of the entries, the first author employed grounded theory by comparing the individual topics of each entry to find an overarching, common theme upon which the project would be based.

Ultimately, the reflection and discussion of emotions was identified as the common theme across all of the chosen entries; thus, the entries were categorized by emotion based on the coded keyword labels that indicated prominent emotions present in the entry. Examples of such labels include “death,” “longing,” “frustration,” and “confusion.” While “death” is not an emotion, it was an example of a keyword label that implied an event related to an emotional experience, such as loss and grief. Lines from entries that communicated emotional themes were highlighted to mark them for incorporation into the poems. At the end of the categorization process, ten main emotional categories resulted: fatigue, anger, anxiety, confusion/uncertainty, fear, loss, longing, overwhelmed/stressed, loss of control/independence, loneliness/isolation.

### Poetic Inquiry Methods

The PJP entries, categorized and with poignant sections highlighted, served as the sources of text for the found poems. All highlighted words and phrases for each emotional category were compiled in a word document and rearranged into poems in an iterative yet organic process. For some poems, repetitive words or ideas were grouped together. Other poems formed a story from beginning to end. Articles and filler words such as “the,” “very,” and “maybe” were cut out to create more impact using fewer words. Poem titles were either “found” from the text entries or made *de novo* based on the theme of the poem.

All words in the poems were produced as lowercase, with the exception of some proper nouns, to induce a sense of equality between the words on the page. This format reflects the sentiment that all of us, the collective humanity, were subject to the impacts of the pandemic. While the extent of its effects varied across nations and demographics, the virus itself reached deeply into the lives every person. The emotions explored in this collection of poems are also universal; we are all subject to feeling these emotions at some point in our lives. Thus, the message of equality suited this project.

The shape and structure of a poem adds another dimension to its meaning (Leggo, 1997). Instead of restricting the poems to be left aligned and spanning only one half of the page, some poems have lines extending across the page, stanzas both left and right aligned, or a distinctly shaped structure. For example, the stanzas bouncing back and forth across the page in the poem, *getting on my nerves*, symbolize a conversation occurring within the poem. The teardrop shape in *breathless* symbolizes the emotion of grief, which is highlighted in the poem. The use of structure to convey symbolic meaning was pertinent to this project because the ability to use other tools of poetry such as rhyme and rhythm was limited because the entries themselves were written in prose and did not naturally include those elements.

Punctuation, enjambment, and line breaks set the pace of the poems. In *breathless*, the absence of punctuation created a rapid pace, which made a statement about the theme of the poem itself. In other poems, increased punctuation induced more pauses, allowing the readers to better digest the weight of each word. Enjambment is the continuation of a thought or idea from one line or stanza to the next. This tool gave the poems more flow and a rapid pace, as the end of a line did not necessarily signal a pause in the poem. For some poems, enjambment between the title and the first line of the poem integrated the title itself with the poem. Deciding where to introduce line breaks was an important part of the poem construction process because this choice differentiated the poem from its original prose and specific phrases in the poem were emphasized by placing them on separate lines.

Constructing found poems was an impactful experience for the first author, allowing her to internalize the stories from the PJP. She reflected on the message of each story and the feelings that resonated with her. Found poetry created an intricate balance of involvement between the researcher and an anonymous collection of entry writers. Although the writers made their stories publicly available, we do not know one another and many of them may not see the poems they helped create. However, the authenticity of their voices is preserved because their original words are retained in the found poems. When organizing the writers' words into found poems, the first author involved her perspective of the pandemic, interpretations of the entries, and personal poetic style. Thus, found poetry became a space of collaboration between the entry writers and first author to provide a united emotional perspective of the pandemic.

The second author served as a mentor throughout the project, initially offering guidance on theory, methodology, and writing, and eventually adding her own voice to the conversation. Once the poems were drafted, the authors discussed each poem and strategized ways to employ visual aesthetics to further illustrate the emotion of the poetry. Poetic inquiry is a reputed form of qualitative research because it portrays the human experience through the lens of emotions (Richardson, 2011; Redman-Maclaren, 2021). Poetry is not simply meant to be understood; it is meant to be felt. One of the key purposes of poetry is to evoke emotion; thus, it was the preferred medium to portray the emotions felt by people during the pandemic.

### Poem Examples and Interpretations

The following are three of the ten poems focusing on emotion. Each poem is followed by a discussion of its construction. See the appendix: *Supplemental File 1: Additional Poems* for the rest of the poems.

#### *pandemic fatigue*

i am tired.

    i shouldn't be,

        i don't have to be,

            i can't be.

not when there are real people  
suffering

    and working

        and dying.

languishing.

not depressed,

    surely not...

...enthusiastic.

the cup is half full,

yet i long for ...

...enthusiasm and energy.

the darkness of january set in.

freezing outside,

want to wait until...

...spring.

don't want to be sad and scared

    of death anymore.

very hard mentally

to go through this cycle

being hopeful,  
to being very worried again.

so close, ...

... yet so far away.

limits are stretching very thin.  
been stuck in this morose state.  
marriage  
    falling  
        apart,  
very close to  
    not caring about.

don't allow myself to...

... feel joy,

it will be taken  
    away from me.

my resilience wearing down thin  
don't feel motivated  
    at all  
        by anything.

pandemic fatigue?  
that is real.

***pandemic fatigue: Fatigue/Tiredness***

In *pandemic fatigue*, the reader is taken through various stages of fatigue as explored in the twelve entries represented in this poem. A striking commonality among most of the entries is that they are from the perspective of parents who are trying to balance their childcare and professional responsibilities. During the pandemic, the lines between work and home were blurred as many jobs were switched to be remote. This led to a dramatic increase of responsibilities a parent had to face simultaneously, and the overwhelming burden of them resulted in both fatigue and guilt. Another theme that emerged within these entries was the erosion of optimism over time. Uncertainty of when the pandemic would end or when vaccines would become readily available to the public made it difficult for people to sustain enthusiasm, resulting in an overall feeling of tiredness. People felt their efforts to survive were often in vain without knowing what they were trying to survive toward.

These themes are reflected in the poem. At first, the narrator is trying to fight the tiredness and be productive. Guilt overwhelms the narrator when reflecting about their lack of motivation: “not when there are real people suffering and working and dying.” Eventually, this fatigue takes over the ability to experience other emotions to their fullest extent. The distance of positive emotions such as joy, hope, and enthusiasm is symbolized by aligning phrases mentioning those emotions to the right of the page while the rest of the poem is on the left side of the page. In the second stanza, the word “languishing” is emphasized because one of the PJP entry writers expressed how this word perfectly described the lack of enthusiasm and emotion



the participant was experiencing. The narrator shares that they can no longer bear going through cycles of emotions, thus resulting in being at an emotional flatline. At the end, this feeling is labeled as pandemic fatigue, a new phrase that has been coined as a result of these times.

*breathless*

sad  
weaker  
vulnerable  
more sensitive  
we have lost and lost  
my colleague committed suicide  
he was such a wonderful person  
he contributed so so much to his field of work  
there is grief for both him and also how he died  
the news echoes and follows me around like a shadow  
the losses we felt when we couldn't grieve properly or mourn together  
we can't give hugs or touches on the arms there is no memorial service or funeral  
and there were no paper programs all too many times i see somebody die from this virus  
the Vietnam vet who survived unspeakable atrocities and now fights for every breath in his  
ICU bed alone mary passed a few days later intubated sedated and alone two years ago i  
befriended a homeless woman on my street she died the other night on the sidewalk in the cold  
she was killed by the virus in that she was blocked from all human contact that sustained her  
reminiscing on you is like opening that bottle of wine you left it is tricky at first having  
to put the screw in and puncture the cork slowly twisting around like the way you stirred  
mac and cheese and did my kinky curly hair your death certificate came in  
today i will pick up your ashes tomorrow i submitted her obituary  
can't bear to look at the published version he cries and waits  
for you to come home i miss you so much  
i never even got to say goodbye

***breathless*: Grief**

*breathless* focuses on loss and death. In order to emphasize this emotional theme, the poem is shaped into a teardrop. This poem is without punctuation, symbolizing the absence of a foreseeable end to the relentless deaths caused by the pandemic, as well as a lack of closure after each one. These deaths were not only due to the virus itself, but also the isolation and depression that it brought about. The first author included multiple stories of deaths spanning eight entries, one after another, with no pause. Here the title of the poem comes in: *breathless*. It symbolizes not only the theme of death, but the poem itself. Since there are no pauses in the poems, if one reads the poem aloud, they are out of breath (“breathless”) at the end.

Death is a part of the natural circle of life, but the pandemic impacted the way we grieve death. Many people could not find proper closure because they could not be with their loved ones in their final moments. Some of the entry writers were healthcare providers who described the pain of witnessing patients' families being unable to be present for the patient: they never even got to say goodbye. Funeral services changed: we increasingly heard about “Zoom funerals” which allowed people to come together remotely to remember a loved one. However, these adaptations could never fully capture the solidarity felt when people are physically present together; they never provided the comfort of physical touch in time of grief. Being forced to stay at home limited options for outlets to express one's grief. The pandemic made

people feel as if they were stuck in one place, but the passing of a loved one was a striking realization the life was still moving on. The juxtaposition of these two circumstances, along with the lack of closure, exacerbated the impact of death on individuals during the pandemic.

*lots of questions*

could i go to my produce shop  
1 mile over the border?  
get in, conduct business fast, and get out?  
or linger and enjoy?  
if the police don't know the rules,  
how can the rest of us know?  
will i be spending thanksgiving alone –  
would i be able to see my family?  
at all?  
am i separated from them  
until the pandemic is over?

it's hard not knowing.

what might i have done  
differently this past year,  
personal development wise?  
but we survived it.  
many others didn't.  
isn't that enough?

i don't really know.

how do we protect ourselves?  
how do we safely re-enter the world?

i wish we had more guidance.

she already has dementia, only get[s] worse  
unless heart failure takes her first.  
why did covid spare her,  
when it's killed perfectly healthy people,  
much younger than her?  
is it some weird sense of survivor's guilt?

i'm having a hard time understanding it.

will i be more lonely when this is over?  
is it more possible i am more religious now  
with church closed?  
what is next?

i don't know.

will there be the idea of dreaming again?  
 will nights be filled with the hum of hope again?  
 will the songs of dark times no longer keep us company?

i do not know.

that feeling tugs at my heart.

### ***lots of questions: Confusion/Uncertainty***

The theme of uncertainty was prominent in *lots of questions*. Each writer raised many unanswered questions across the ten entries in this category, so that theme was emphasized in the poem. These questions often led to people mourning the loss of the life they once had, a life that did not hold all of these new concerns. “Where do I wear a mask, where do I not?” “When will the vaccines be available?” “What will I tell my kids or grandkids about the pandemic?” “Will I even get the chance to have kids or grandkids?” People had grown accustomed to the predictability of life, but once the pandemic hit, one of the writers described it as “something out of a dystopian novel.” It was difficult to process that this was our reality and not a collective nightmare we were waiting to wake up from. Over time, people began accepting the fact that there was no “going back” to normal, but uncertainty loomed over what a “new” normal might look like.

The poem starts off with a series of questions about changes in lifestyle, to represent the first concerns we had when the pandemic hit. However, as the poem goes on, the questions become directed inward and more personal. The lack of knowledge about how to navigate the pandemic brought discomfort to many of the writers. The stanzas bounced back and forth from being left and right aligned, creating a conversational structure in the poem. Every time a stanza asks a series of questions, the reply is “I don’t know,” which becomes a refrain in the poem. The constant lack of a definitive response creates a void in the poem, leaving one feeling restless because there is no answer and a lack of closure, creating an inability to move on with life. This was the harsh reality of the pandemic: we were fighting an invisible enemy, an experience that hardly any of us had lived through before. To say that we were confident in our actions would be a lie. The resulting constant state of confusion and uncertainty people faced during this time tortured them.

## **Discussion**

These three poems, produced using the words of dozens of people, express the experiences of fatigue, grief, and uncertainty familiar across society during the pandemic. This is noteworthy because the pandemic catalyzed deep divisions that continue to threaten unity in families, communities, and institutions. Emotions form the basis of human connection. Although the specific experiences highlighted in each of the entries may not be shared across different people, the fundamental emotions expressed in them are universal. Emotions allow us to empathize with one another, and we can use our own emotional experiences to understand and validate someone else’s worldview. Research focusing on shared emotions, especially in the form of creative public work, serves as a model for future work to address these divisions.

Some limitations of this project include a lack of access to demographic data regarding the participants of the project, given the anonymous nature of the featured entries that were used. This made it difficult to decipher the specific cultural background or locale of the person behind each entry, eliminating the potential to make associations between specific demographics and personal experiences of individuals within that demographic. Although the

project was open for anyone in the world to participate, most entry writers resided in the United States and thus the poems created in this project mainly describe the American perspective of the pandemic. The *Pandemic Journaling Project* website had English and Spanish language options, so participation required fluency in either of the languages, potentially limiting the ability of other groups of people around the world to participate. For future works, we recommend looking at pandemic narratives from underrepresented groups or global communities who may not have had the same level of access and agency to participate in this project.

Another limitation of this project is the medium of found poetry itself. Since found poetry is “constructed” rather than “written,” the first author struggled at first with not being able to insert her own words to improve syntax or flow of the poem. This led to continuous restructuring of the poems and decision-making regarding which aspects of each entry to include or exclude to construct the final poem. However, this limitation for the researcher gave more power to the entry writers because their words were used as-is, and not coated within the frame of the researcher’s thoughts. Thus, this method of found poetry, while potentially limiting for the involvement of the author, overall strengthened the quality of the research by authentically highlighting the perspectives of the participants in their own words.

Initially, we intended for the poems to focus on different professional perspectives of the pandemic. For example, the poems could reveal the different perspectives of a healthcare worker, a small business owner, or a university professor to see how the pandemic impacted the day-to-day experiences of each profession. Once a close reading of the texts began, the first author was surprised to find that most entry writers did not reveal or discuss their professions in their journal entries. Instead, they typically focused on more personal aspects of their lives or only provided vague references to their job. This is where she realized that emotion was the larger, common theme across these entries and would be better suited for the project. When we came together to discuss this new direction, we realized that coding based on emotion moved beyond the labels we quickly apply to individuals when we ask, “What do you do?” Without these labels, we were forced to consider a more humanistic way to code people’s experiences, and thanks to that insight, the project took on a deeper resonance. Keeping an open mind towards new themes that might surface through reading the entries thus was crucial to the methodology of this project.

The goal of the PJP is to ensure that the history of the pandemic is written by the ordinary individuals who lived through it, not just the powerful (*The Pandemic Journaling Project*, 2020). In a time where we lost control of our lives to a virus, having control over how our stories are written is pertinent. Researchers engaging in narrative inquiry hand power to the storyteller by listening to and absorbing the experiences of individuals through natural conversations. Poetry, as a medium of emotional expression, has the power to allow the poet to transcribe their thoughts and feelings into words on a page while simultaneously allowing readers to experience the same emotions as they take in those words. Together, we find narrative and poetic inquiry to be valuable empathy-building processes and recommend these methods of qualitative research for academic and community spaces that seek to bring together diverse perspectives.

## Appendix

### Supplemental File 1: Additional Poems

#### *getting on my last nerve*

##### **part i**

idiotic graduations, sports games, concerts  
right next to funeral pyres burning.  
Americans honestly give zero shits  
about anyone except ourselves.

the rest of the United States acted stupid.  
now their stupidity could affect us again.

what is it going to take  
for people to take this seriously?  
pathetic and selfish  
if people think  
their freedom is compromised.

pretending it's not happening  
doesn't help.

there are still idiots  
who have no concern for others.  
i don't see us out of this pandemic  
anytime soon.

to hell with protecting others –  
because ya know,  
it is my right to be a complete jerk.

have people forgotten  
the pandemic?  
it's driving me insane –  
the pandemic is not over.

people refusing the vaccine.  
will prolong the virus.

the CDC [is] out of their minds.  
permission to go without a mask.  
angry and upset?  
you bet your ass i am,  
you should be too.

people are taking this  
as a joke  
at the cost of  
human lives.

wonder if  
she would have been alive  
if more steps were taken  
to prevent the spread.

**part ii**

my mind can't stop  
wishing them death  
for their ignorance.  
why show compassion and care  
for white nationalists  
who have screamed  
the n word at me?  
who have caused so much  
generational trauma?

I HATE HIM SOOOOOO MUCH.

i am nothing to the US  
America should be nothing to me.  
America will abandon me,  
the foreigner,  
as soon as it possibly can.

why would i ever want to forgive  
someone who spread[s]  
hatred and pain?  
my religion may say one thing  
yet my heart keeps aching  
from the reality i live in.

disappointed with friends  
who followed conspiracy theories.  
those friendships may be  
forever damaged  
beyond repair.

everyone's on edge.  
it doesn't feel right.  
i feel expendable.

**part iii**

walking on a tightrope about a thousand-foot gorge.

sick and tired  
locked in the house  
like some type of animal.  
like being sheltered from a world  
i already know the dangers of.  
i'd rather be homeless

he turns it on me.  
 he turns it the fuck on me.  
 why have i done this for 20 years?  
 what am i getting out of this relationship?  
 the actual attention?  
 the partnership?  
 nope. not there.

Jesus Christ.

*panic attack.*

the delicate castle i made for myself  
 came  
     tumbling  
             down.  
 my heart racing,  
             almost in tears  
 wanted to cry,  
             but didn't.  
 horrible  
     helpless  
  
 couldn't find him –  
             hospital was a maze.  
 anxiety  
     has become like shoes –  
 you simply wouldn't leave the house  
                                     without putting [it] on.

shaking  
     when out in public  
 no longer used to  
             social interactions  
 still in  
     survival mode  
 uncertain  
     how to get it right  
 don't want things  
             to go back  
 we're opening  
     too soon  
 wears  
     on my mind.

how safe is it?  
     what are the new social codes?

how does one really keep

distance?

what do you call it

when you're still being

traumatized?

not PTSD –

TSD?

ugh.

**40 weeks and 5 days**

pregnant  
desperate to  
have my baby,  
my mom couldn't  
be with me couldn't  
get a doula either. what  
will happen if i get it? in a  
sick way i hope i get it already  
so i don't have to be afraid  
but then i hope it's not too  
bad because well there is  
no room in the hospital.  
i don't know how to feel or  
what I think can't figure it  
out. it's always hanging over  
me every doorknob is trying to  
kill me, can't possibly be safe –  
danger everywhere not sure how  
to deal with it. a surge is coming  
getting careless now could prolong  
[it] indefinitely, i'm obviously not going  
too much too fast it scares me i'm so  
terrified. these are complicated times  
maybe that is the reason my baby  
doesn't want to come yet

**march 13, 2020.**

all my social interactions disappeared  
friday the thirteenth of course.

i miss spending more time with my friends.  
i miss patient contact interacting with people  
going to the grocery store is the highlight of my day.

weeks turned to months



i feel disconnected without [social media];  
the only connection i have to people.

all the days bleed together  
don't have any friends left. down to zero.  
can't exactly go out and make new friends.  
the loneliness creeps up on me. appears out of left field.  
how empty i feel sometimes  
in my 17 m<sup>2</sup> room. my one-bedroom apartment  
tiny and very lonely.

isolated out of necessity, but now i wonder  
the impact this long-term quarantine is having on  
my drive and passions.

been having crazy mood swings  
h i t m y l i m i t.  
b e c a m e i n c r e d i b l y d e p r e s s e d.  
j u s t c a n ' t d o t h i s f o r e v e r.

i have my ups and downs,  
but today is particularly down.  
i almost wept as i walked to the beach.  
i wanted to walk with someone  
who wasn't there.  
i will probably never see her  
not only because she's so far away,  
but also because she's walking with  
someone else.  
i need to remember i am enough.  
for now.  
i'm trying to love myself. but it can be  
hard.  
we're all just doing the best we can.

sat inside  
watching through my living room window  
an older brother taught his younger brother baseball  
felt nostalgic just watching

it's easy to feel isolated and alone in my room,  
but there's something about  
hearing kids laughing and  
birds singing

life is still going and  
things haven't stopped  
even if it feels like it.

*i miss*

i just wanted the entire world to take a breather,  
so i could too  
i wanted it all to stop  
and a week later,  
it did.  
it all happened so fast.

i miss –  
studying in the university library  
theatre  
my friends at school  
my boyfriend  
my dad  
myself.

i'm missing –  
out on the prime of my life  
a year of milestones  
that connection and sense of accomplishment from my work  
the indescribable bliss i've felt at past shows  
the luxury and privilege i had of escaping this household.

i miss –  
human touch and connection  
a crowd of 400 people standing, unmasked, packed together like sardines,  
beads of sweat bouncing from one person to the next.  
have not been touched by man or beast  
have not had grand and glorious sex,  
for far too long  
want to feel his big burly body around me  
need my dad hug.

feeling –  
empty and lost for the first time  
overwhelming sense of hopelessness  
deep grief for each cancellation, almost like a mourning  
angry so i don't have to feel sad  
restless to start again  
a ride of terrifying wave of feelings and emotions each day  
kind of kovid-krazy.

i crave someone to deeply love me back  
i want need somebody to love  
i'm needy, too.  
but i don't find love. and love does not find me  
so i go back and join the ranks of the lovelorn,  
in the middle of a pandemic that knows no end.

Last year, everything was too swift and novel to process the loss

this year, it's almost worse, knowing for a fact that it's just not going to happen.

The world's been stopped for too long.

### *forced five*

she makes a mistake  
doesn't get the desired  
yogurt flavors a  
small thing we're used to  
controlling but it's  
difficult not be-  
ing in control of  
it now [pandemic].

looking forward to  
start my dating life  
for real but now,  
have to spend another  
few months at home.  
my entire inde-  
pendent life has been  
on hold a lack of  
sense of direction  
disconnected from  
myself. my greatest  
fear – by the time i  
can finally move,  
i'll be emotion-  
ally stunted fear-  
ful weak and i just  
keep clinging to my  
parent for support.

gotten used to hav-  
ing my entire life  
being ruled by this  
one virus and am  
no longer okay  
with it [corona].

### *no time*

showing all the symptoms.  
everything is scary when vulnerable.  
the doctor told me the best medicine was "rest."  
things have never been busier.

several code blues (cardiac/respiratory arrest) a day.

a front row seat to  
the cases and casualties  
desperate for nurses,  
as are so many other hospitals.  
the pace at work is relentless.

an *un*masked technician wanted access  
to my house – my sanctuary – my safe place.  
i did not let him in.  
my service light came on in my car –  
another sanctuary and safe place.  
no alternative to that.  
a greater level of risk  
than i am used to.

started struggling with insomnia  
in march 2020.  
all night could not sleep  
for at least 3 days since it hit.  
still not sleeping very well.  
feeling very weary.  
had a headache for 3 days now.

it's daunting.  
the (extended) family relies on [me] for too much.  
i wish [i] could stay home and rest.  
i wish [i] could not worry about everyone else's worries.  
definitely drinking more than i used to.  
too much sometimes.  
have no time to be sick.

everything seems normal until  
i remember it's not –  
the overwhelming thoughts that  
things are not normal,  
that we cannot go about life  
like we want to or would normally,  
sometimes pull me down.  
then i remember,  
this is normal now.

i have a hard time thinking about  
living in a world  
that looks like this often.

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