

The Pandemic Project



SUNY Erie

Spring 2020

The Pandemic Project evolved in Spring 2020 when the annual Spring Arts Festival was cancelled due to COVID-19. Knowing that our students would not be able to recite their work live on the stage, we wanted to carve out a space to commemorate their creative efforts. It was our hope to share their voices and talent by recording their challenges and the ways in which they came to terms with the pandemic in this collection. Special thanks to Michelle Michael-Lippens for suggesting we find a virtual venue for this project.

Edited by

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These pages are dedicated
to those who lost their lives
during the COVID-19 outbreak
and to all essential workers
and those on the frontlines
who risk their lives every single day.

May art be a constant source of light and healing
for all who struggle during dark times.

COVID-19

Lauren Jackson

Freely roaming this Earth without thought,
Enjoying the comforts of life as taught.
Hugging, shaking hands without forethought,
Completely came to a halt.

Biological attack?
Perhaps!
Merciless, demonic
Unknown counterattack.

Reality exposed
Medical interventions slow
As the body count grows
The virus dominos.

Will it end? So they say.
Just stay inside
Don't disobey
Life will resume -one day.

These Days

Jacqueline Ciesla

These days you feel alone.
You wonder if there is someone feeling the same.
Stuck in the house, is someone else is doing the same?
How life has changed.

You go to the store staying apart from everyone,
wondering if someone around you has the virus.
You need to get things but you don't feel safe.
Does someone around you feel the same?

Soon these days shall end.
Hoping to get to normal again.
Who knows what the future holds,
that is what someone once said.

A Challenging Pandemic

Alexandra Harvey

During these challenging times,
Someone is risking their life.
Exposing themselves to a monster,
A deadly disease affecting us all.

Everyone is cooped up at home.
Schools, restaurants, and businesses
Are all closed to the public indefinitely.
Someone is homeschooling their children.

Someone is losing sleep worried for loved ones
Becoming a victim to this vicious illness.
Fighting the battle alone in a hospital room,
Hoping there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Not walking across the stage, missing prom,
Cancelling weddings and having a baby alone.
Someone is missing out on important milestones.
Lives are being turned upside down every day.

Life has changed drastically for many people.
Someone is helping out neighbors and communities.
Together we will get through this and come out stronger.
Soon we will all be together again; this too shall pass.

Seeing without Seeing

Jennifer Campbell

It's better navigating a pandemic
without bifocals
tiny details too worrisome
long shot not crisp

Without my contacts
I can barely see 6 feet ahead
to those I might want to reach
so no use getting caught up
in a menu of choices:
sweet or sour
well done or raw

Without my contacts
I will never see the future
stocked or bare
full or alone

Not being able to see
near or far has advantages
I can live present
in my small sphere
comfortable in myopia
concave in the day
light spread to the edges

The Quarantine Villanelle

Nicole Backes

Stuck in the same house all day long
Finding new things to do is a challenge
Singing to the same favorite song

Working out a lot to become strong
Exercising the muscles to waste the day away
Stuck in the same house all day long

Taking my time with chores to prolong
Whistling to the same tunes over and over
Singing to the same favorite song

Getting really good at ping-pong
Trying to find new hobbies to kill time
Stuck in the same house all day long

Going outside is not where we belong
Tucked away underneath our favorite blanket
Singing to the same favorite song

Taking all the toilet paper is just plain wrong
Watching everyday items flying off the shelves
Stuck in the same house all day long
Singing to the same favorite song

Salt and Irony

Phillip Zaborny

Foreign factories are churning.

Poison smoke stacks billowing, burning.

Pumping American ideals to those yearning.

Full, so full of it.

You see...

The -c-h-a-i-n- of events is written by shackled hands.

The contract signed in blood, bound by iron, covered in grease.

Deep fried dreams and teenage queens— merely tokens of complacency.

Disease and thought police, so get down on your knees and put your fucking hands up.

Because your life now, you don't own, but lease.

But Happy Meals are three dollars. So.

Pandemic

Jennifer Campbell

originally published in *The Buffalo News* April 5, 2020

--Sonnenizio on a line by Robert Lowell

History has to live with what was here,
cannot decide what should remain
and what is thrown in a dumpster fire.
Fire or not, you can't erase history
with licks of flame; the past has to smolder,
has to simmer below the obvious world
until the countless insults with which
we lived for years fester, infect us
here in the present, with the speed
and scope of a pandemic, here
with all the histories still whitewashed
and mansplained with urgency—
we'll not forget to live with fire
so long as we're here to detest and admire.

The Obvious

Fawziyah Khan

Anyone will know when I say
life outside the box
is what is keeping me sane.

When the screens matter no longer,
life is not just breathing
and my lungs are stronger.

Anyone will know when I say
that the wind catching my hair
is the best part of my day.

When I am not shackled by society,
the people don't have a say
and there is an end to my anxiety.

Anyone will know when I say
the grass beneath my feet
is much better felt this way.

Pandemic

Chloe Maher

The spread began but fear proved far more contagious
A sentence of isolation
No more work or cars driving
Only preparing for
When we are still

Streams turned crystalline and the air tasted pure
No more iron organs causing infection
Animals abundant with hope for the future
Notice how they say hello
When we are still

Trivialities of life before used as a mask
Ignoring the death, the pain
Complacent with no unity, not understanding the deeper meanings
What can we do
When we are still

With all the time in the world and no fog clouding the view
Notice the storm that is beginning to loom
Connect to your body made of grass and dirt
The answer is revealed
When we are still

The natural mirrors you must stare into
Two bodies just the same
In this story we are both the poison
And the sufferers
When we are still

So take this time to wake up
Take a long breath, be mindful of your footprints
Realize you are but a single branch
The movement is apparent
When we are still

Coping with COVID

Nicholas Hall

In March we were told that schools have closed down
for the rest of the semester, but why?
Coronavirus has shut down the town
forcing all the residents to comply.
Isolation is making me crazy.
Playing games online with friends helps me cope—
I should do my work but am too lazy
is Quarantine finally over... Nope.
The bond with my family has grown strong:
Zooming calls, watching movies, playing games.
Social distancing does not seem so wrong
Wearing masks, isolation, not so lame,
since this virus has made us strong as one
and when this is done, let's go have some fun.

I Wish in the Dinghy of Your Heart

—after Robley Wilson

Aeyesha Chowdhury

I wish in the dinghy of your heart
you would let me be the helm
where you let me lead the way
when you are lost and have nothing to spare.
I imagine the pervasive storm
but, hang in there, for this anchored ride
shall flatten the curve on its way.

Social-Distance Dating

Alicia Scampoli

I fell in love with your thoughtful green eyes
And the way your white teeth shine when you smile
The way you say good morning when you rise
The way you dress and your attractive style

You are the subject of my endless dreams
All-day I think of the curls of your hair
I see you on screen my heart bursts at seams
You were the answer to my one prayer

I miss how it felt to be held by you
You made me feel safe in a world of fears
An embrace from you is long overdue
My cheeks still burn from the salt of my tears

One day this pain will be a memory
Until then it feels like a century.

Kaleidoscope Eyes

Brianna Hall

take me to the upside down...
lemme learn my shadow side.
i had to hide my frown,
and take a look inside.
i found darkness, i found light,
i found peace and i found fights,
i found battles, i found wars,
but after that i opened doors.
the doors had no handles-
so i traveled thru the channels.
i saw visions of sandcastles.
warriors going to battle.
i saw myself lighting a candle,
a broken match- i had to gamble
with my fear.
i had to tamper with my tears.
felt my anger and it pierced.
i let go and changed severely.
no expectations seeing clearly.

Sunday Zoom

Lisa Wiley Moslow

originally published in *The Buffalo News* May 10, 2020

At half past noon, we gather on Sundays,
click on the meeting link—
like my grandmother from the old country
took rib roast out of the oven,
drew us to juicy meat and mashed potatoes.
Cousins colliding over bottles of Coke.

As all extended families,
we look like *Hollywood Squares*
or *The Brady Bunch* in our boxes.
Delays and dogs barking don't bother us.
We've made it another Sunday,
still laughing in our squares.

Stuck in My Own Prison

August Schnorr

I remember the tiring workouts
But now those are just an old memory.
When the toilet paper wasn't all-out
Now this feels like it's been a century
When sanitizing our hands was easy
But now a screen is how we have to talk
Staying inside has been quite uneasy
Now I am a fool to go for a walk
Before I was struggling to find free time
Now a deadly pandemic leaves me bored:
No party or any sport is at halftime
Luckily plenty of food I have stored
So when everything is back to well
I will then be freed from this living hell.

Duplex on a Line by Jericho Brown

EN 141 collectively written poem
last seated class March 12, 2020

Some of us don't need hell to be good.
Options of heaven can't prevent evil.

Options of heaven won't prevent evil.
Others shouldn't pay for your mistakes.

Others shouldn't pay for your mistakes.
Hospital beds, rot shoulders with resting heads.

Hospital beds, rot shoulders, I rest my head.
Lost voices drowned out by panicked masses.

Our lost voices drowned out by panicked masses.
Guardian angels can't slay all demons.

Guardian angels won't slay all demons.
Wrong places are overcrowded or empty.

Shelves aren't overcrowded. They are empty.
Some of us won't need hell to be good.

Haunted

—a duplex from Edgar Allen Poe
Madeline Davison

Never its mysteries are exposed.
Gates should remain open but mine will stay closed.

Gates could remain open but mine will stay closed.
Ghostly tendrils strike at my conscience.

Ghostly tendrils tear open my conscience.
Eidolons beg to be one with me again.

Eidolons plead to be one with me again.
Visions of the past are known to haunt dreams.

Visions of the past linger and haunt my dreams.
The night sky gets closer as I gasp for breath.

The night sky chokes me as I gasp for breath.
What other horrors of the mind are enclosed?

What other horrors of my mind are enclosed?
Never its mysteries are exposed.

Coronavirus: The Days Mesh Together

Chase Radecki

Each day filled with Indifference, so bleak.
Nothing to accomplish, sole progress halts.
The time spent indoors makes man feel so weak
Boredom rages on, walking a flat waltz.

The days are lethargic, at a snail's pace
Moments pass with a depressed melody.
The marathon goes on like a drab race;
This germ has folk asking for remedy,

although this disease aches us, there is hope.
Good people are born in times of trouble.
The virus will unite us, we will cope.
It is time to burst the COVID bubble

I promise that better days lie ahead—
Laughter will fill the air and joy will spread.

Celebration in Isolation

Jennifer Groblewski

All around the world, people's lives have changed.
From East to West we're forced to stay inside
with the ones we love; schedules rearranged.
Like tigers in a cage; our rights denied.
Summer's coming soon; how long will this last?
Grass is getting greener, flowers will bloom.
I look towards the future, not the past.
Yet I fear that solace won't come so soon.
While together we are stronger than one,
In times of peril, some shine the brightest;
like newborn stars, our lives have just begun.
This won't bring us down, not in the slightest.
Though we feel we are stuck in this machine,
I know we can surpass COVID-19.

Simple

Braden Colby

In 1966 things were simple.
That's when my parents were born
and things were different then there are now.
As I grew bigger, the world started
to become much more complicated. I always
asked my dad what it was like when he
was a kid and when things were so simple.
It amused me and I would dream
about growing up in times like that.

When cops were loose going, when
gas was 50 cents, when cops didn't
care about kids having parties and big fires,
when cameras were not a thing and the best of all,
when cell phones didn't exist.
Well my dream has come true. It is now
2020 and we have entered a pandemic.
Besides the cell phone part, everything else is becoming simple.
Gas is cheap, cops are loose going, people are
staying to themselves, traffic is light. I never thought it
was possible, but I guess it is.
Even though it's not a good way to experience
simple life, it makes me want to live the rest of my life
like this, just without the virus.

Fear

Jordyn Marie

Fear.

That's all anyone can think of right now.

Fear.

Streets are silent,
Making the streetlights appear dimmer.
While flashing lights,
From law enforcement light up the sky.

Businesses are locking their doors,
Turning out their lights,
Letting their employees leave early
So they get home before dark.

Neighborhoods are either supporting
Or ripping each other apart.
Houses are locked up,
Young children are pulled into bed with their parents.

Essential workers on the nightshift are afraid,
Their families even more afraid,
That their mother, father, brother, sister,
Might not even make it there or back home.

Those who cope with fear by using humor
Are cracking jokes about how
Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley

Left the threshold of earth at the right time.

Businesses that helped us in our time of need
Are now being targeted for looting.
All of this in protest for injustice
But spreading nothing but fear.

Moving trucks are turned into
Harbingers of death
To those who just happen to be outside
When the sun goes down.

Curfews are being set,
A state of emergency has been called.
All for injustice.

The year 2020 is one for the history books
But not in the way we want.
First it was the Australia fires,
Then the global pandemic,
Now protests and riots.

Communities are begging for this to stop
But those involved are demanding to be heard.
We hear you
And there are better ways.

Nothing was ever solved with violence.
As MLK once said,
“Hate cannot drive out hate—”
There are better ways.

We have stood together in the past,

Supported one another.
Surely we can do that again,
Through more peaceful circumstances.

We can make our voices heard,
Then no one will have to pay a price.

Quarantine Is Like Growing Out Your Bangs

Lisa Wiley Moslow

It's painful at first—
not knowing when it's going to end.
The neat fringe framing my face gone,
pretty, blunt edges blurred.
Nothing clearly delineated anymore.
A suffering poodle in desperate need
of grooming, vision obscured,
I can't brush these dark wisps away
long enough to see 20/20.
Too mature for sleek plastic headbands,
I muster every ounce of restraint
to keep from lifting scissors
to these imprisoning locks before
they safely blend into a soft pony.

The Wanderers

Jordyn Marie

“They told us that this would blow over soon. That’s why they didn’t have a problem locking us all up in the same hotel. That’s why they tested everyone that came in and out. Once a week we would file down to the ground floor to have our fate sealed by our body temperature. They said this would last at least a month, maybe two. That was a little over a year ago.” I fiddled with my feet on the desk chair I was sitting in as I continued.

“We had enough supplies to last us a year but now what? Food and water ran out two days ago. We’ve all been wearing the same clothes for weeks. Law enforcement patrol the streets all day every day. For as far as you can see it’s yellow hazmat suits, camouflage uniforms, flashing lights, military vehicles and every now and again a scream from someone who got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. If I didn’t know any better, we’d be waiting for the zombie apocalypse.”

“You look outside and the Sun is shining and it’s warm. But we’re all inside. The only people outside are law enforcement and the Wanderers, the people who test positive or the unfortunate ones who just happen to have a temperature that’s just a few numbers higher than normal. They could be completely healthy otherwise, but they don’t want to take any chances. As it is they lock down the entire building. They close off the ground floor to everyone no one is allowed down there unless it’s for testing and even then it’s, one at a time. So that it’s one of us against thirty of them.”

I leaned back on the chair pulling the blanket on my lap up to my chin letting the chair swivel from side to side slowly.

“We told them about our food and water problem but all they say is that they’re working on it. It’s a ghost town in here and nobody cares. This is happening all over the country and our numbers were cut in half in the last month. We’re dying and it’s not even from what they’re trying to protect us from.”

I heard a door open behind me.

“We have to do something-”

“You’re not seriously doing that video diary crap they want us to do are you?” My best friend said from behind me. I sighed and shut off the camera that was in front of me.

“It’s the only thing they ask us to do and all we ask is for more food and water and-”

“And what Bella? They aren’t going to do anything about it. No matter how many people do this they’re not going to listen to us. We’ve been asking them for weeks now and all they care about is testing and more testing,” he said flopping down on the couch.

I turned the chair to face him.

“They’ll listen to me,” I shrugged.

“What makes you think that-”

“Because if it wasn’t for my dad those nurses down there would be out of a job. They’ll listen to me,” I said standing up. Adrian smirked and copied my actions. He walked closer to me, his smirk fading.

“Okay Bells. We’ll do this your way. But when it doesn’t work-”

“You mean if-” I laughed.

“When it doesn’t work. We’re doing this my way.” He looked at me now with seriousness in his eyes.

I intended to hold my ground and hold onto the belief that the government would listen to me just because my dad was in the secret service, but I knew he was right. I started to respond when I was quickly interrupted by the head nurse of the building speaking through the PA system.

“Attention all residents. We will begin this week's testing in ten minutes. Please make your way to your family’s assigned rooms and wait for further instruction.” I rolled my eyes causing Adrian to shrug and laugh.

“One shot. You get one shot at this or I’m taking over,” he said pointing at me as he walked out of the room.

“Taking over what?” my dad’s voice said from behind me.

“Nothing,” I said quickly my voice cracking slightly from being startled. He gave me a concerned look as my sister walked over to me. She didn’t say anything; she just walked right by me. I looked at my dad who shook his head.

“Hilly, are you okay?” I said turning around to look at her.

She didn’t say anything she just nodded quickly and grabbed my brush from my bed and ran it through her hair multiple times.

“Hillary, what’s wrong?” my dad said walking over to her.

“I’m just a little nervous,” she said holding back a cough. I looked at my dad who shot me a worried glance.

“You don’t have a fever do you?” he asked, placing his hand on her forehead.

She shook her head.

“No, I’m just really tired and congested-”

“That could be anything right? I mean it's allergy season they know that people here can have allergies. Right?” I said quickly, my eyes bouncing between them. He hesitated.

“Dad,” I shouted, snapping him out of whatever daze he was in.

“Yeah, she should be fine,” he finally said looking at her before walking out of the room. I shook my head and grabbed Hillary's hand pulling her over to the full-length mirror near the sink. She sighed and tilted her head.

“Do you think this looks okay?” she said referring to my dress she was wearing.

I laughed and looked at her through the mirror.

“Hilly, you are the literal copy of me,” I laughed turning to her.

“If I look good in this you will definitely look good in it too.” She smiled at me as a knock sounded on our door signaling that they were ready for our family. Since our dad was high in the security chain, we got to be one of the first ones tested. My dad was already down in the lobby waiting for us to meet him. My sister and I made our way out of the room and down the hallway. The only sound was our two sets of footsteps matched with the eight nurses that came to get us. Just a precaution they’d say to us.

Once we reached the lobby, my sister and I were brought to opposite sides of the room. I sat down on the bench in the middle of a group of ten nurses, my eyes not leaving where they took Hilly.

"Isabella Cloud, daughter to Mark and Gweneviere Cloud, identical twin sister to Hillary Cloud, 17 years old?" the head nurse read off my paperwork. She looked at me and raised her eyebrows.

"Yeah," I said weakly.

"Excellent," she said, placing her clipboard down next to me and smiling.

"How have you been feeling Isabella? Any cough, sore throat, fever?" she asked, placing her stethoscope on my chest.

"No. Even if I did, I wouldn't tell you," I said blankly. She looked at me before wiping a small thermometer scanner across my forehead.

"It's allergy season," I added. She sighed and wrote something down on my paperwork before speaking again.

"Looks like the only thing wrong with you right now is a bad attitude. Do you have any questions before you leave?" I sighed a quick sigh of relief before speaking again.

"Yeah just one," I said leaning forward, so I was right in her face.

"Food ran out almost a week ago. Any plans to fix that anytime soon?" She took a step back with a small smile on her face.

"We are working on it, Ms. Cloud. You can go now," she said, her smile fading.

"Yeah right," I said to myself as I walked over to my dad. He gave me a concerned look as I got closer to him. I smiled and shook my head as I watched him visibly relax and pull me into him.

"I have some things to take care of down here. Why don't you go back to the room and wait for your sister," he said into my shoulder. I pulled away from him and nodded slightly. I pushed my way through the nurses to reach the staircase we were led down and began my climb back to the second floor of the hotel we were all trapped in. Once I got back to our room, I swiped the key and unlocked the door. I pushed it open and flipped the latch so the door wouldn't close completely, sat down on the couch and waited. After about twenty minutes, a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," I said loud enough for whoever it was to hear. I watched the door open slowly and sat up when I saw that it was Adrian. He never knocked; he always just walked in.

"Adrian. What's wrong?" I said, standing up to speak to him.

"Where's your dad?" his voice shook.

"He's doing some secret service stuff downstairs. Why?" Something was off about him.

"They just released the people that tested positive," he said, staring off into space.

Then suddenly I remembered something he told me about one of his brothers. He was one of the people who have a naturally high body temperature making it seem like he had a fever over everyone else. It raised some flags in the past, but they always found a way around it.

“Your brother,” I said as he looked at me. I’ve only ever seen him like this once before and that was when both his parents got cast out at the same time.

“My brother, and your sister,” he said. I froze.

“My- What?” I said turning around and walking towards the window.

“Bella-”

“She didn't have a fever though. It was just a-”

“Cough I know. But that’s all it takes sometimes. She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time,” he said from behind me. I felt the sting of tears in my eyes as I looked down on the fifty or so people that had gotten cast out. I let out a small gasp as I saw the familiar blonde hair of my sister. She was holding onto someone’s arm, but I couldn’t make out who it was.

“Did you ask them about the food?” Adrian said, making me jump.

“Yeah, she said that they were working on it,” I said as he rolled his eyes.

“They’re working on it, my ass,” he said under his breath. Before I could say anything else, he turned around and walked out. I followed as he made his way down the hallway banging on two doors before walking into his own room.

“What are you doing?” I said following into his room.

“Zeke, Tris let’s go,” he shouted. Suddenly two sets of footsteps came up behind me. I held my ground as Adrian walked back over to me and shut the door locking the deadbolt. I followed him around the room with my eyes as I watched the three of them walk to the balcony, climb over the railing and fall to the ground below. Adrian shot me a smirk as he copied the actions of our friends. I ran to the railing and looked over it to see them laughing and high fiving each other.

“I’m sorry but that the hell are you guys doing?” I shouted down to them.

“We tried your way, now it’s my turn. You in or you out?” Adrian shouted back to me.

“Uh.” I looked around desperately trying to find a reason not to go.

“They aren’t going to listen to you, Bells. Just come with us.” I turned again and looked down at my best friend. He gave me a weak smile and shrugged.

“Just trust me, Bella this problem won’t get solved unless we do it ourselves.” I sighed to myself as I pulled my long blonde hair up into a ponytail at the top of my head and climbed onto the railing. I closed my eyes and drew in a deep breath before I stepped from the balcony. I felt a pair of arms grab me before I hit the ground causing me to open my eyes. It was Adrian. He gave me a smile before gently pacing my feet on the grass that surrounded the hotel.

“You know jumping off of something with your eyes closed isn’t the best idea,” he laughed. I punched him in response making him laugh harder.

“You try jumping off a second story balcony for the first time. It’s scary,” I said defending myself. He shrugged.

“I just did,” he said as the sound of a truck came towards us.

“Hide!” Zeke shouted as Adrian grabbed my arm and pulled me into one of the bushes near the building.

“They’re just picking up the nurses from the lobby. Once they leave, head towards the town,” Tris whispered to us as we all watched the nurses file one by one into the military truck from the lobby.

Everyone nodded but me. She had a plan, great but she was forgetting a few things. There isn't just military personnel patrolling the streets. There's police and the wanderers, and they are probably worse than law enforcement. The law enforcement will just catch you, test you and see whether or not they should throw you back like some sort of fish the wanderers have been known to kill the people who have what they want. The healthy ones are more dangerous because they're faster and stronger, but the ones that are sick you can't underestimate either they get you sick you're out. I looked at Adrian who gave me a concerned look.

“That's a good plan Tris, but what about the police and the wanderers?” I said as the truck started to pull away from the hotel. She shot me a glare.

“If you see them then run,” she snapped at me. Her and I never got along very well, but she was a friend of Adrian's, so I behaved around her.

“Let's go,” Zeke said a little louder standing up.

We all stood up quickly and followed him in the direction of the town. We walked for what seemed like hours before we finally started to see the town hall building. It was surrounded with police cars, military vehicles and wanderers. I grabbed Adrian's arm, and he pulled me closer to him.

“I don't like this. We're gonna get caught,” I said quietly, keeping my eyes on the wanderers. “If not by them then by the wanderers.”

As we neared the building, I heard arguing between one of the wanderers and an officer. I couldn't make out what they were arguing about, but it escalated quickly. We all started walking faster when we heard the gunshots.

“Just stay close we'll be fine,” he said watching the crowd next to us. We walked a little farther and bickered amongst ourselves a bit before we finally got to a grocery store. Like everything else in this town, it was surrounded by wanderers and a huge fence meant to keep us out.

“How are we supposed to get through that?” I said watching them.

“Just stay together. Don't move too fast or make too much noise or we'll be obvious,” Adrian said quietly. We all agreed and started walking. We had made it almost halfway to the gate around one of the grocery stores when I kicked a piece of siding and made a noise. Suddenly all eyes were on us.

“Run,” Tris said quickly as the mob started to close in on us. I ran as fast as my feet could carry me.

“Get to the latch!” Adrian shouted at me when he saw me taking the lead.

I nodded to myself before picking up more speed, if that were even possible. I got to the latch of the gate before anyone else did and struggled with the lock that was on it. It needed a key.

“I can't get it open,” I screamed looking for another way in. Suddenly Zeke pushed me to the side with a rock in his hand and slammed it down on the lock several times. By now the rest of our group was there and so were the wanderers.

“Come on, Zeke,” Adrian said from behind me. With one final blow to the lock, it broke open allowing the door to swing open.

“Woah-That was awesome,” I said to myself.

“We have to go,” Adrian said as he dragged me into the fence and slammed the latch locking us in from the inside. We all stood there for a moment to catch our breath before making our way to the front doors of the local grocery store. Once we got to the doors, I noticed yet another lock and bars along the windows of it.

“Great, more locks,” Tris said quietly.

“We need to find a way to get in there. Look for something to open the doors. Here, Bella take this,” Adrian said picking up a wooden baseball bat off the ground and handing it to me. I took it cautiously and looked at him.

“Okay, what am I supposed to do with this?” I said looking at the bat then at him. He shrugged.

“I don’t know. Like hit something with it? Maybe smash a window? Or-”

“I’m not going to smash a window with it-”

“If the both of you don’t stop bickering, I’m going to smash both of you with it,” Zeke said with his back turned to us. Adrian and I looked at each other.

“Okay, I’ll smash a window with it,” I mumbled walking over to a window with no bars on it. I was about to swing when suddenly the doors swung open. Zeke picked the lock to the front door.

“Oh thank god,” I whispered, dropping the bat at my feet and following everyone in. My eyes widened and my mouth fell open as we all took in the sight of this place. The lights were off and there was dust and dirt all over the ground, but the displays were completely empty. The cash registers were all open or broken, some of the shelves were broken too from people climbing all over them to get the last of whatever they were getting. The sheets of paper that told everyone how many of each item they could buy per person while they were panic buying were on the floor. Some were still stuck to the shelves that held the hand sanitizer, soap, paper towels and toilet paper. I never understood that one.

“Oh my god,” was all that I could say.

“It’s completely empty,” Tris said, finishing my thought as we walked down the canned goods aisle. Our voices echoed against the bare walls and floors. Our footsteps crunched with all the dust and dirt on the floor. Everything was gone. It looked like a ghost town in here. Adrian sighed.

“Okay. We’ll have to go further see if we can find another store with food,” he said.

“Really?” I said, raising my voice slightly. He turned to look at me and raised an eyebrow.

“What?”

“You want to keep moving further? Did you not see what we just went through to get into this place?” I shouted. He took a few steps towards me as my voice bounced around the store.

“Look, all I’m saying is that if we waited a few more days maybe they would’ve been able to fix this with-“

“With what Bella?” he shouted at me this time. I jumped at his suddenness.

“Look at this place. They’re not doing anything because they can’t do anything.” He continued opening his arms and gesturing around us.

I crossed my arms and looked down.

“For all we know they could have all the food and are keeping it for themselves. Are you coming with us or not?” His voice was quieter now. I looked at him and the rest of the group.

“You guys are going now?”

“Uh yeah, Bella if you haven’t noticed we’re kinda starving here, are you coming or not?” Zeke snapped. I hesitated and pushed a piece of my hair that had fallen from my ponytail out of my face.

“Fine. But we should at least take some water,” I said nodding towards the few bottles of water that were hidden in one of the coolers. Zeke nodded and walked over to it and started filling his bag with the bottles. Adrian didn’t move; he just stood there looking at me. I shot a glare his way.

“Look Bella I-“

“Don’t,” I snapped stopping him from trying to make the situation better.

After we finished in this store, we were able to sneak out the opposite side and continue walking further out. After a few more hours of walking in silence, I started to notice that the sun was starting to set.

“We have to find a place to stay for the night.” I whispered, trying not to speak too loudly.

Adrian nodded silently as we started to see some lights in the distance. As we got closer to it, I realized it was a camp of some sort. There were tents scattered all over the place along with grills and fire pits with picnic tables close by. We were in a park that was converted into a camp.

“Are you sick or healthy?” A woman's voice said, making us stop.

We just stood there as she walked up to us. She looked familiar, but I couldn’t remember who she was.

“It’s okay if you’re sick, you can still stay. We just need to know so we can take care of you properly.”

“You take care of sick people here?” I said my eyes wide. She smiled at me and nodded.

“We take care of the sick, the tired, the hungry and the healthy. We do not believe in casting people out just because they may be sick,” she said her voice sounded smooth like she’s given this speech before.

“Well we’re just tired and hungry,” Zeke said.

“We can help with that,” she said before motioning us to follow her deeper into the camp. As we walked through, I started to recognize people from the hotel. Some had been cast out because they were sick, but now they seemed perfectly fine. They were cured and having fun with everyone and eating fresh meat that had been hunted that day. She sat us down at a table and served us anything we wanted until we were full. After we were done, I wandered off and found a hard shelter to climb up on. I smiled to myself as I looked up to the stars. We were finally safe. I felt a movement next to me, but I ignored it.

“Here, have some,” Adrian’s voice said to me. I looked over at him and saw he was sitting next to me and offering me the last sip of his water. I smiled and took the bottle from him.

“Thanks,” I said tipping it into my mouth. We sat in silence for a few minutes before he finally spoke.

“What do you think our families are doing right now?” he said looking at the stars.

I shrugged.

“Looking for us probably.”

“Yeah, yours is probably,” he laughed.

“What’s that supposed to mean? I’m sure your brothers are worried about you,” I said looking at him now.

“Nah, everyone is fine without me,” he said now staring off into space.

“Hey,” I said, nudging his shoulder making him look at me.

“Who was there for me when my mom got cast out? Or when my best friend of 16 years got cast out? Or when my twin sister got cast out-“ my voice started to shake.

“Okay okay. I get it-“

“And who was there for you when both of your parents got cast out at the same time?” He looked down trying to hide a smile.

“Bella-“

“Who was there?” I said, smirking.

“You,” he said looking at me now with a smile. We laughed together for a second before I spoke again.

“We’re always going to be losing people. Whether it’s this virus, starvation, dehydration or just overall sanity loss,” he let out a chuckle.

“But we’re always going to need someone to lean on. You’re that person for me,” I said looking back at the stars.

“We could stay here you know,” I said suddenly. I felt his eyes on me.

“Seriously?” he said, smirking. I shrugged.

“Adrian, they know how to hunt. We’ll be safe here.”

“What about your dad?” he said looking down. I shook my head.

“He’s one of them. He’ll be okay.” I heard Adrian chuckle quietly. I looked at him with raised eyebrows.

“Who knew the daughter of a government agent would be living in a camp on the other side of town,” he said laughing. I laughed and looked down.

“Situations like this can change a person. You never know who the person you’ll end up becoming,” I said leaning over to rest my head on his shoulder.

He didn’t say anything. We just sat in silence watching the stars together ready to see what this new life was going to bring us. In a place that ran towards the problem not away from it. A place that weighed out every option instead of casting someone out at the first sign of trouble. This is the place we belong.

Quarantine Journal
Zachary MacPherson

14 March 2020

you don't get to choose how or when you're going to die. you can only decide how you're going to live — joan baez

16 March 2020

nothing makes my closed eyes light up more than a day spent doing what i do. and thinking about what it's all worth.

do you know the way?

mistakes are opportunities for learning

be more confident in all encounters today and save time overall. gotta break some eggs to make an omelette

she can run the light as long as no one is put in danger sometimes you gotta take big risks to please the big wigs

she could walk in like boss as bitch she is smelling light and striding with the confidence of a human with a finished to do list.

I'm also ready to work until my spirit collapses every damn day.

homework is something i need extensions to complete, but i will complete it when feel fire growing from my teacher's impatience

20 March 2020

Now I'm chilling in the attic. corona is still taking the streets. i was supposed to do important english homework today i'll have to do it tomorrow.

i'm feeling loose i should grab a beer last night i drank a lot and it's okay because those lite beers be hitting at an acceptable level.

the book wants me to meditate for ten minutes.

mom just said tomorrow is the last day we can leave the house on account of the virus. i only have one more day i can spend with the homies before i'm basically grounded.

That was a nice little peace and quiet time. I'm smiling. I'm gonna grab myself a couple beers and get back to work.

some real zinger distractions i fall for are smoking weed and drinking followed by talking to friends

i don't want to make you swim laps but if i catch you fucking up same as i had to learn reconciliation you're gonna take all your mistakes in the form of laps around the aisles on your knees. when shit get stressful. tell me or someone you trust you need a minute. you're a smart kid and you seem capable of holding this position if you run into any trouble tell me asap. tell whoever is coming my way to relay a message and i'll kill a bitch if i have to. but most of all have fun. and seriously you have my number, even if i don't respond immediately that doesntmean i'm not scheming revenge on a mf.

The two dogs say I love you. The sunshine struck through a brisk night

19 March 2020

naps during quarantine drive me mad because i lose consciousness out of boredom and lose valuable hours that i could spend in productivity.

i wake up frustrated and feeling behind in my efforts to be a good human.

at first i thought about using my favorite pen but idk where the bastard has runoff to.

when i go on the internet i realize how important it is to stay occupied during quarantine isolation.

22 March 2020

yada yada buddhasiddhartha abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz # salingers 8th about that kid that liked art but his art school got shut down # stimulus

what if i woke up every morning feeling refreshed relaxed and energized? i'd probably get a lot of reading and artwork done

do i feel strong comfortable and clearheaded? yeah when i'm not zoning off some reefer beer or dehydration. How do i perform at the prime of my health? athletic intimidating quick efficiently focused.

23 March 2020

the professors are now ready for online distance learning. so i guess it's about time to get cracking on that front. my independent studies have kept my brain from rotting but still

24 March 2020

the professor was like whoa i can't meet anybody face to face and i was like look man i'm healthy

he should just get a water bottle that brings him joy

i've read the damn emotional intelligence book and it taught me not to believe tests online it told me i just have to train myself to love everybody without inhibition. inhibition is what made hemingway slam shut his writing room door. maybe that was salinger. i'll probably forget before the virus worries clear.

25 March 2020

i blamed my mom for sending me to college when i wasn't ready. i avoided study time and homework by hanging out with my friends and over scheduling myself with work

the situation at home got real intense because she knew i wasn't working hard enough and i didn't want to work harder because i didn't have any direction.

things got so intense i had to leave home for a summer. it may have been two summers ago now. i still think to myself what a wonderful world. had i taken responsibility for what was goin on i could be in medical school right now. but i was lazy and indecisive. now i'm still finishing up my time at community college.

27 March 2020

i went to ecc bright eyed and bushy tailed. i was excited to go take classes and figure out what i would do for the rest of my life. i thought i'd want to run a business or be a dentist. well i didn't do good in the prerequisites for either of those but i did like sociology. i switched my major to general studies. that's when i realized the width of the horizon ahead of me. i could legitimately get educated in any field i wanted. it didn't matter how available the jobs are in my area. so now i'm about to graduate from ecc with a fine arts degree. next month i have to pick my major or be accepted into a program at buffalo state university and from there i'm only two years of schooling away from being able to teach in a college level setting the art discipline of my choosing.

30 March 2020

with my world in quarantine I'm gonna try to paint

3 May 2020

For no good reason

4 May 2020

My ambitious morning plans.

7 May 2020

The tradition. Jericho Brown

Today I started running.

10 May 2020

Quarantine.

12 May 2020

Nothing matters anymore

Tuesday. It's great woohoo yeah I ~~fucking~~ hate everyone I know.

Conference with the boys

Donkey's birthday party isn't something I can go to bc there's already two zachs and no single ladies. Bc don't show out for birthdays bc quarantine.

13 May 2020

Today was day three of carts at tops.

I had help sanitizing today. Early today a lady told me she thinks we should keep scrubbing the carts for a year or two after quarantine. I think that's a bit too much

14 May 2020

Today I woke up at about 7:15. Then I showered and went to work. Today I didn't bring a mask and I had to wear a scarf. This job isn't bad. Time passes in a predictable fashion. Everybody's nice to me and I take care of my responsibilities. For snack time I had cinnamon rolls and 32 oz of milk. when I got home I had the remaining cinnamon rolls. I'm already too late for coffee. I've taken two naps between work and dinner. Now that it's after dinner, I need to make some drawings and I plan on finishing the portrait book. I was watching some artist talk today on YouTube and they made me realize I want my images to be strong enough to hold attention for a couple minutes of consideration.

15 May 2020

Today is an on and off rainy day.

It's 10:25 and I'm on my 15 minute break. I'm not getting a snack today bc I've had lots of snacks the past couple days. Today I got a ton of carts and now my fellow cart man is here to help me out. I'm happy. I'll have less than 90 minutes when I'm back to work and I'm chilling in the break room.

16 May 2020

Zach the anti hero
Self awareness
Afraid of being known

Consequences of actions
Never truly adjusting
Growing up vs leaving forever
Peace
Sobriety
Accomplishment
Penance
Looking nice
Sharing meals
Does anything really go back to normal?
Is staying out of trouble enough?
Does art need a point?
Was it nice while it lasted?
Did you make the right decision?
How did you learn to deal with the happiness?
Do you miss the mess?
Do you appreciate the people in your life?
What if tonight was the last night we talked to each other?
Can I tell you a funny story?
What if you only had one movie to watch every night until the sun boils the oceans?

You know the times you're silent because you don't have anything to say?

18 May 2020

I'm not sure if I was supposed to have help today but it's been just me on carts. I've done a couple of the recycling machines (including one miracle return). I'm still not sure where the mailbox is. For my last 50 minutes I'll probably get carts and do one more chore from the cart list. Today I found a broken window and low key wanna check out if it leads to the land of dragons.

20 May 2020

Today was good I did carts.
Tomorrow is pay day.

25 May 2020

Today's Memorial Day.

Brother is talking to mother in the room next door. Something about gpa. I like quiet and sometimes I just want to be alone with my book.

Affection makes me uncomfortable. One is a dreamer the other a realist. I hope I'll have time and space to make my art. I should have enough quality works to have a show after quarantine. I haven't shown work in like three years.

I don't like online dating. It brings too many randoms into contact with my tools. I want to meet someone in my day to day life that thinks I'm cool. I guess I'd like to be recommended by a friend. In fall hopefully I'll meet some interesting people at school. My social circle has been small since the outbreak. My social circle has been small since I graduated high school. Quarantine has taught me not to worry about my room being too small. The outside is supposed to be an extension of the home environment. In my room I only need a bed to read and make art on. Ideally, I'd have a Spot to stash some books and art supplies but overall I don't have many needs.