

tales from the PANDEMIC

**A Journal of Creativity
Inspired During the COVID 19 Quarantine**

VOLUME THREE

MARCH 2, 2021



TOUCH, MIXED MEDIA
BETH ANN SHORT

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copyright statement

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about

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submission information

Tales from the Pandemic is looking for well-crafted, diverse tales, told through words, humor, art, graphics, photography, video, or music. The work needs to have been created during the pandemic, while not necessarily being about the pandemic.

We value the earth, all humans and other animals. We believe white supremacy is the air that we breathe in the United States and work to dismantle it by amplifying marginalized voices.

Wow us. Be brave. Your work will be treated with respect. Tales from the Pandemic will be a journal of the creativity of this time.

Open to established and emerging creatives.

If your work is accepted you retain copyright and give Tales from the Pandemic the right to publish in our digital journal, on our website, via social media, and in marketing to grow viewership of the journal. We accept previously published work with appropriate permissions.

INSTRUCTIONS: Email your submission to kittymoshpit@gmail.com, type "tales-submission" in the subject line. Get more details at our website tales-from-the-pandemic.com.

tales from the publishers

Welcome to Volume Three. Seven days without electricity and a short month of production makes this a stubby issue. Oregon got three months of winter dumped on us over one long weekend. Incredible. We three—Sarah Koehl, Renée LaChance and Mimi Luther—have been in a COVID pod together during this quarantine and Tales from the Pandemic was born during our time together.

Each issue is dependent on submissions and the jewels we see that we like and seek out to publish, creating a snapshot of the pandemic every issue. A piece we saw on Facebook caught our eye this month and we got permission to print it. Marty Katkansky submitted a valentine about caring for her beloved during COVID and we loved it. Others sent fiction, mixed media, photography, poetry, and essays to provide respite in this chaotic world. Enjoy, and grab a napkin, this issue is juicy.

Happy tales to you.

—Renée LaChance

Beth Ann Short

The cover, entitled Touch, is dedicated to my sweet Aunt Jean who we lost in December to COVID-19. She was such a light in my life and one of my last elders. Due to COVID precautions, her family cannot have a funeral and we are expected to grieve in new ways. Art continues to be my place to process.

posing seemed benign
your eyes haunt me-follow me
if you only knew

mushrooms grow over you
their beauty misconception
patience all we have

—Beth Ann Short





COLORED PENCIL ON BLACK STRATHMORE ARTAGAIN PAPER, BY KARLENE LUSBY



FALLING LEAVES, WATERCOLOR ON ARCHES WATERCOLOR PAPER, BY KARLENE LUSBY

creative

Karlene Lusby is a lifelong artist with a particular passion for natural subjects. An Oregon native, she treasures the incredible beauty of the Pacific Northwest and tries to convey this spiritual connection through her artwork. She enjoys doing illustrative drawings, loose expressionistic paintings and occasionally abstracts. She has been a private art tutor and has also taught classes in drawing, watercolor and botanical illustration.

“Live outside of the box” is my first social commentary piece. I realize that we box ourselves in, both physically and mentally, spending so much time inside of four walls, cars, or in front of boxy screens. We also categorize ourselves and each other into “boxes.” Let’s spend more time away from those boxes and live outside in nature and fresh air.

Circling the Reservoir

Barbara Ford

I circle the reservoir
sniffing for blue and green
and negative ions
to ease my jangled nerves

this pandemic stroll
around a jailed lake
is a ritual
of sweetness and a mourning
at the same time.

These reservoirs almost disappeared
were it not for a determined group
of neighbors longing for
the open space of water in the city

My ritual now
my peering through the bars
are both a resistance
to the orders to stay home
and a submission to the loss
of lake, of river, of ocean
during the lockdown

How is it for this confined pool?
the holy flow
that is water's greatest gift
is denied by the cement
forbidden by the iron bars

This reservoir
a compromised balm for me
is water on permanent lockdown
the only escape is sky on a hot day
the only reunion is rain



PHOTO BY BARBARA FORD

no earth below with burrowing
creatures
no fields to flood
no trees to pass by
no fish leaping at sunset
no underground waterways
to bear the stories of mountain
streams
racing downhill

even still
the captive blue surface
whispers to the rest of us
of the possibility of wildness
or the peace of stillness

sometimes ducks appear
with little ones in the spring
errant tennis balls float in groups
a raft of wild, erratic hits
from the nearby courts

the morning sun glints and sparkles
the great mass of crows
who gather in the evening
take turns bathing together
on the cement slopes

and the others of us who come
with strollers
with dogs and fitbits
and our own
yearning to move freely

we make a point to wave
to extend an invisible smile
behind the masks
to express our mutual
humanity as we walk in circles
in pursuit of connection
while striding through the distance

BARBARA'S CREATIVE INFORMATION
APPEARED WITH HER POEM IN
VOLUME ONE.
[DOWNLOAD IT HERE.](#)

dropping

crows drop feathers as
squirrels drop nuts
the Sun drops itself while
pulling the Moon into the sky

our clumsy minds,
dropping time and memories,
forget parties, and work, and
dentists appointments and
packages

dropped by strangers
on the porch

how you dropped everything when
that phone call came,
jaw and stomach first,
then knees
dropping into the
broken glass on the kitchen floor

these days we are full of echoes,
hollowed, drop after drop
falling through our fingers
like handfuls of dirt
paper masks
and tears

Collin McFadyen



COLLIN'S CREATIVE INFORMATION
APPEARED WITH THEIR POEM IN
VOLUME ONE.
[DOWNLOAD IT HERE.](#)



PHOTO BY KARI AHLERS :: DREAMSTIME

Garden Angst

by Kathleen Huber

I love to garden. I learned about gardening as a kid from my Aunt Adeline. She would put on her gloves and head out with me in tow to work in her various cascading terraces. She would weed and chat about this plant and that one, the two Christmas trees she rooted and the owl that loved her huge tree in the center of it all in Millbrae, California. Soil, which by the way is not dirt, was a big problem, but green things seemed to like her, and flowers and roses and the huge bougainvillea on the side of her home bloomed happily. Of course, it was Millbrae.

Many years later, having moved to the Pacific Northwest, I keep at

it planting tomatoes, kale, spinach, lettuce, carrots, beans, etc. But, since COVID began, there has been an increasing glut on the markets for home gardens, do-it-yourself, let's update-the-house-now-that-we-are-home folks. It's hard to find a good plumber, but seeds and soil, forget it.

Then I found this wonderful garden Facebook page. I love all the posts and during COVID read them voraciously. In doing so, I have learned I am not worthy. Their gardens are lovely, full of growing things. They are knowledgeable, walking encyclopedias. Have a question about what the heck that green thing is by the

fence? Post a picture and you will get the botanical definition of it, what it is good or not good for, along with a few stories about what they did with whatever the heck it is. There are hundreds of responses to questions on slugs.

After having my eyes glued to reading all the posts, I am feeling pretty anxious. They all have land, and if they don't, it looks like they do. They have chickens, I have no chickens. I have an H-O-A. The HOA says I cannot have chickens. I thought to tell them they were support chickens and that I desperately needed them for mental health. Given COVID, I thought it might work.

I've ordered seeds from a catalog because I do not want to walk into a nursery. I read that seeds are going fast and I got an email that they are behind because of orders.

And, more than once, I now find myself staring outside from my yarn-haven room, at the raised beds. Are there any worms there? Are they happy? Did I do right? Was the hay okay to put on them? Should I remove the cardboard? I put some worms under the cardboard—thought they'd be warmer. They are ex-fishing worms. I insist on rescuing any unused ones, as I figure they deserve a better chance at life. They are big ones though, and I could use the little squirmy red ones. There was a post about worms a while back, maybe I should look to see where I can buy some. Will I be able to get enough manure? I bought chicken manure once, the neighbors were not happy. The worms were happy though.

And, I need to have a plan for those raised beds NOW! I need to figure out what I put where seeing as it is already February and Plants have preferences. Never mind homo sapiens, in the garden world all relationships are complicated. You can get several books and charts on that—I have them. Carrots don't necessarily like to be with a tomato. Corn and beans are happy together, but I don't have enough room for corn. I had plenty of room for squash last year though, still have about 10 butter-nut squash to cook up. And what about my dog who loves jumping



PHOTO BY UDRA | :: DREAMSTIME

in and out of the raised beds like an obstacle course? How do I plan for that?

There are just too many questions to answer. Speaking of the dogs, should I or shouldn't I plant fruit trees? They like to dig. The list of trees available from the garden gurus is overwhelming, not to mention the list of places you can get them. I like a good applesauce apple though; but then, gee, a nice peach would be good, too. But, which one is juicy enough to eat and make a decent pie or applesauce, and is it on dwarf stock because you can forget ladders. They'd be nice for bees. I only saw a few last year, until the sunflowers bloomed and the bachelor buttons came on. The wasps liked the bachelor buttons too; that was odd, but I didn't post a question. IS it too early or too late to plant those trees? Do I buy

more blueberry bushes? I still have about 4 pounds in the freezer we picked from a blueberry farm. And, should I throw those sunflower seeds in with the massive amount of blackberries on the other side of the fence? Will the coyotes still like the run we created for them last year when the Mrs. carved out areas to pick the berries? AND is it too late to buy seeds? So many nice dry beans to get and try—I could use more of them.

Then there is the front yard. I'd like to do more with that hideous slope full of grass, but the HOA is such a pain to deal with. Sigh.

I need to get more coffee before I get back on Facebook.

KATHLEEN'S CREATIVE INFORMATION
APPEARED WITH HER STORY IN
VOLUME ONE.
[DOWNLOAD IT HERE.](#)



A Simple Red Brick

by JoAnne Bennett

Waking up in the middle of the night, I panicked for a few moments. I remember thinking to myself, “Where did I put it?” I found the paperwork tucked inside one of my favorite childhood poetry books. My friends and family recently gifted me a red brick that was placed at Pioneer Square in downtown Portland, Oregon in the summer 2020. More than just a simple red brick, for the first time in my life, I won’t have to fear anyone taking away this special gift because the last names on it never belonged to me.

Honestly, I was just thinking out loud when I posted to Facebook: “I am going to have to do a GoFundMe to get my brick.” I loved the idea of hav-

ing my full name somewhere in cement or clay. My no-name birth certificate has always felt so empty.

Facebook has been a wonderful way to reconnect with friends, some all the way back to the third grade. An amazing feat since I attended 10 different schools in Reno and throughout California. While growing up, I never lived anywhere long enough to feel like I truly belonged. Social media has given me a voice to finally be able to express some of those confusing feelings that got lost in my family dynamics as a young girl, and even as an adult.

I should have known my Facebook friends would want to help me, however, that was certainly not my intention posting that day. One year, I innocently

shared how much I love Christmas socks. Gifts started arriving in the mail from all over the United States. I had enough new “fun” Christmas socks to celebrate my very own 12-days of Christmas.

My long-time friend, Heather, who lives in Idaho, left a comment on my brick post, “Are you serious? I can get you \$100 in less than 30 minutes from more than a few people you know!”

I answered, “You just brought me to tears. I couldn’t possibly put into words what this means to me. I have never been able to tell anyone what I needed. It feels good and right that all of you would want to be a part of my celebration. Thank you so much!”

“It’s been less than 30 minutes and it is fully paid for!” Heather later wrote. “We love you so much. When I send you your information, I will give you a list of the people who donated.”

This solid red brick will finally be something sealed in cement that is the honest-to-goodness truth about me. No longer am I that innocent newborn who fell through the cracks of the legal system long ago. Sadly, I was never important enough to my deceased replacement parents to be given their last names on my birth certificate. Courts in several different states would not help me fix the serious problems it created.

I look forward to finding my brick when the twin pandemics — COVID and the racial reckoning — resolve enough for me to visit Portland’s Pioneer Square. It will be one of those joyous moments like sitting on the beach watching the tumultuous waves go out with a beautiful sunset. For too long, I struggled to find closure, but thanks to my friends and family, this simple red brick, filled with so much love, goes a long way toward that healing.

No longer am I that innocent newborn who fell through the cracks of the legal system long ago.

With a sense of closure for some difficult chapters in my life journey, I replied, “Thank you from the bottom of my heart. This means so much to me. I can’t stop the tears, but they’re not sad tears.”

Before ending our Facebook conversation, she said, “It was so easy for me to do. You deserve this and it isn’t a big thing.”

My friend, Heather, knew that it had a much deeper significance to me than paying the \$100 for a red brick. The fact is that for years I’ve had to pay dearly for the losses and wrongs from having incomplete birth and adoption records filled with discrepancies that insultingly looked like business deals gone bad.

creative

I am from the Pacific Northwest. I love focusing on my passion – encouraging, enriching, and lifting the hearts and spirits of those that need it the most. Although my journey has been difficult at times, writing has been my lifeline. My work has appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals over the years.

I want my stories to always be reflective of the love and hope that I carry in my heart.

A Changed World

by Aisha Naseem

When the news of Covid-19 blooms and bursts into the news cycle
Like a noxious dandelion summer sprouted overnight
I am still on the other side of the Atlantic dreaming of Nani's mango chutney
And a precisely packed bag with-
Oatmeal
Ensure (for diabetics)
And a BJ's size box of her favorite pretzels in limbo

It's been 1,825 days since I last saw her
But her spices line the cabinet
Her ordained abilities
To know measurements without sight
Keep me clothed on holidays
The promise of her voice, on the phone, ten time zones away
Is an anchor resting in the deep
Shaking off Assimilation like a shallow spring shower

Morning yanks me awake
A sudden snagged thread in the sewing machine
Modi's lockdown with four hours notice
Has left all of us marooned

In this sentient moment,
While the rest of India buzzes with frenzy
Lessons from Catholic school
On God's divine disasters flood my brain
I rummage for a prayer in the direction of Mecca
A flicker of cosmic dust to turn the tides

Charged with an electricity of devotion
I plan to write Nani—
About the lanterns at night illuminating Chandni Chowk
How I know Shah Jahan's Old Delhi: the Red Fort and Jama Masjid
Relics of the Mughals
Guarded for three and a half centuries by the sons of Hanuman
Were built to protect us from calamities like this

When, like a slap in the mouth
I get the call that she is dead



Red Fort



Nani and Nana (left) 1956

creative

Aisha Naseem is a Massachusetts native and a Chicago, IL transplant. In 2019 Aisha won first place in the University of Iowa School of Social Work's annual National Poetry Contest for Social Workers. As a recent graduate of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and a longtime political operative Aisha is interested in the intersection of art and politics. Aisha is a third generation activist, artist, and a first generation American.

This work was created to commemorate the multitude of losses that have been experienced, transnationally, and suddenly, within the onset of the pandemic.



Valentine's Day 2021

by Marty Katkansky

It was bedtime in early April, the night of the 'pink moon.' I had stood on the deck and watched as the moon rose above neighboring rooftops. It was a giant glowing full moon, and it was not pink.

I went to bed and read before putting out the light. Even with the mini-blinds shut my room remained unusually light. It was odd, but not eerie. I lay there for a bit nudged to write something as my head lay on my down pillow. There was something about this 'pink moon,' its diffuse light in my room and the concurrent pandemic that was happening all over the world. Some words spilled from my tired mind and the idea of a poem briefly occurred to me, but I was not a poet.

At the time, I was a tired 77-year-old woman in the midst of a pandemic that promised to take thousands of lives. I closed my eyes and invited sleep to quiet my mind, a mind that had not been unduly alarmed or frightened by the possibilities posed by the pandemic, but was now prodded by a fuller than full moon. Eventually, sleep quelled the urge I'd had to write something, but that urge never quite stilled.

That moment passed, but the memory of that pink

moon lingered, coupled with the disappointment that I did not rise from my bed and try to capture the words stirring in my mind. On that day in April, 13,000 Americans had died of COVID-19. Late April, when I recalled that night, COVID's toll in the US had risen to 56,000. What could I possibly have written that night that would have mattered then or now? That fear that what I might want to write was not meaningful enough for me to bother.

*That fear that what I might want
to write was not meaningful
enough for me to bother.*



PHOTO BY ICEFRONT :: DREAMSTIME

Marty Katkansky (CONTINUED)

Now it is Valentine's Day, and I am a 78-year-old woman still living in the midst of a COVID pandemic that has now claimed over 500,000 American lives, and rises daily. COVID is not merely the background of our lives, it is our lives.

Over these many months, I thought to write. I meet monthly on Zoom with a small writing group I have belonged to since 1995. Only two of the five of us write regularly but we gather for community and to support each other whether we write or not. Many times over the last decade

my writing friends have suggested I write about my experiences with my partner's Alzheimer's disease. I have resisted, feeling I had nothing worth adding to the mix of writings already in existence about this dreadful disease, but the memory of that pink moon lingers.

The onset was noticeable to me long before Crystal's actual diagnosis was made 10 years ago. For several years our life was not remarkably different, just issues of memory loss. We still saw friends, family, traveled, saw plays and mov-

ies, ate out at restaurants —things we enjoyed in retirement. Except for my being aware of the ultimate outcome of Alzheimer's, it affected our lives no more than my arthritis. But in the last couple of years, this COVID year in particular, the decline has been precipitous.

It is a relentless and inexplicable disease. Crystal is still verbal, although she has lost much of her vocabulary. She feeds herself, dresses with my instruction, uses the bathroom when reminded, but cannot find the bathroom or any other room in our 3-bedroom

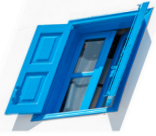
We have been in a lesbian relationship since 1991, but she no longer knows what gay or lesbian means.

house. We have been in a lesbian relationship since 1991, but she no longer knows what gay or lesbian means. She knows that she loves me and that I love her, but she doesn't know the nature or duration of that love. Sometimes she doesn't know me. Several times she's asked if I was her father and what was my name. She doesn't know the difference between a table and a countertop. The fridge is a mystery, as are its contents. Almost nothing on television makes any sense to her. Some think of Alzheimer's as returning to being a child. This is not the wonderment of childhood, because she will never again be able to comprehend the answers.

I live with this reality every day, but I cannot imagine what her reality is like. What is it like to be in a living room that you have lived in for years and not recognize it? To not remember from one moment to the next where the bathroom or kitchen are? To not recognize me, her partner of 30 years, or a jug of milk, or a cube of butter, or any object that she has seen thousands of times over the decades. To not believe that you are 79 years old or that the woman who raised you has been dead for over 50 years. This is her reality.

During the last decade, but particularly in this past year of COVID, the phrase "one day at a time" has taken on new significance. It is a phrase I learned over 34 years ago when I knew that alcohol was the enemy I had to learn to live without. Steeped in the misery that comes with alcoholism, I couldn't imagine a year without drinking, let alone 34 of them, yet I did it, one day at a time.

Opportunities for respite from Crystal's care diminished as the grip of the COVID pandemic demanded social distancing and other precautions. It didn't help when I had surgery that required no weight bearing on one foot for 6-8 weeks and had to struggle with getting around and getting things done using a wheelchair or knee scooter. I've had enough help to get by, but I've been with Crystal every minute of every day. My resolve to be the loving partner she needs and deserves has sometimes failed me as irritation creeps into my voice when responding to her repetitious questions: "where should I be?" "what should I be doing?" "what should I be eating?" "what should I be drinking?" "am I in the right place?" An especially vexing question I face repeatedly every night when we were in bed.





CRYSTAL, 1991. PHOTO BY BECKY BILYEU

If particularly tired and irritable when the night ended with this inevitable barrage of questions, I would escape to a book, knowing that for her there was no escape from her fear of everything she did not and could not know. Hoping that sleep would soon quiet her, I lay there thinking, too often, that horrifying thought that I could not do this anymore. Sleep ultimately comes to her and eventually to me, healing, restorative sleep—albeit

creative

I am retired from real estate sales, managing, and investing, teaching and financial planning. I live in Vancouver, Washington with Crystal, my partner of 30 years. I was married for 20 years and had three children before realizing I was a lesbian. I've always enjoyed writing so often wonder why I resist doing it so much. I wrote 90

interrupted by my several trips to the bathroom. In the morning we will begin another day, with as much love as I can muster and forgiveness when I fall short, sometimes for one minute, or one hour, and one day at a time for as long as I can and hopefully longer, because, from the beginning with Crystal, I've wanted to be a better version of myself. The challenges she presents gives me myriad opportunities to be that.

percent of a novel and after many rewrites decided it wasn't worth the trouble. I get my best inspirations when I'm retiring for the night and I'm generally very successful at ignoring them. Although these ideas often vex me mightily, few of them have prodded me to put them on paper. The idea for this piece would not let me go.





PHOTO BY SANTIAGO

I am Not a Cat

by Talia Cooper

“I am not a cat,” the man said. And at the time he’d meant it. Sure, he’d felt a little panic then, but it was a normal kind of technology-based panic. The kind you feel when you get a new phone and don’t know how to use it. Not to mention the panic of your boss witnessing a gaffe. But who wouldn’t feel that way?

His friend called an hour later to say he’d gone viral. “Shouldn’t we stop using that term in this day and age?” He asked his friend, but only in his head. Out loud he just sighed and made excuses to quickly sign off. Then he opened his computer and typed his name into the search.

Then it was the regular panic of any accidental fame, sitting in the limbo of Embarrassing or Sweet. He lay awake that night readjusting his pillows and his thoughts. “Will this affect my job?” “No, it’s fine.” “But is it?” “What will my friends think?” “They won’t care.”

“But what if they do?” “How can I show my face in public?”

It wasn’t until he had gone at least three rounds that he realized; no one actually did know his face. The thought that he could still shop at the local Albertsons without incident comforted him just enough to be able to drift off to sleep.

Then came the emails.

Trevor Noah wanted to interview him that very evening. So did Colbert, Samantha Bee, Howard Stern, Hannity... and then he stopped scrolling. It appeared his cat was the one thing that could unite the divide. He clicked on the first email from Trevor’s people. “Mr. Noah would be delighted to host you at your earliest convenience. Please call us to discuss the details. Mr. Noah requests that you leave the cat filter on.” So. It appeared he could remain at least somewhat anonymous. And didn’t his nephew

love the Daily Show? He called the number.

Later that night Trevor flashed his pearly whites: "So, was it hard being a cat in law school?" "Oh, ha," he replied, unused to banter. Then a thought occurred to him. "I mean, it wasn't purrrfect. They wouldn't let me have milk during the bar exam!" Not his best joke, but it made Trevor laugh in a way that seemed unscripted. He didn't get a lot of chances to make people laugh.

He went back to his email and called up the other numbers. "I'll only appear as the cat," he told each of the assistants.

The public lapped it up. He knew it would only be his 15 minutes, but he didn't want more anyway. He was a lawyer, ready to get back to

his regular legal life. "Say the line, say the line!" Samantha Bee said gleefully. "I am not a cat?" He said, his whiskers shifting. Samantha hooted. The virtual audience clicked like. He slept well, knowing he'd made people smile.

It wasn't until the following Monday that the new kind of panic started. It was subtle at first. He walked out of Albertsons carrying his groceries as he did every Monday. Except this time he thought he saw something in the reflection of a passing car. But no, it was just his face mask, wasn't it? In the privacy of his own vehicle, he pulled the mirror down. "I am not a cat," he said, and the mirror seemed to agree.

That night he looked at his reflection again while brushing his teeth.

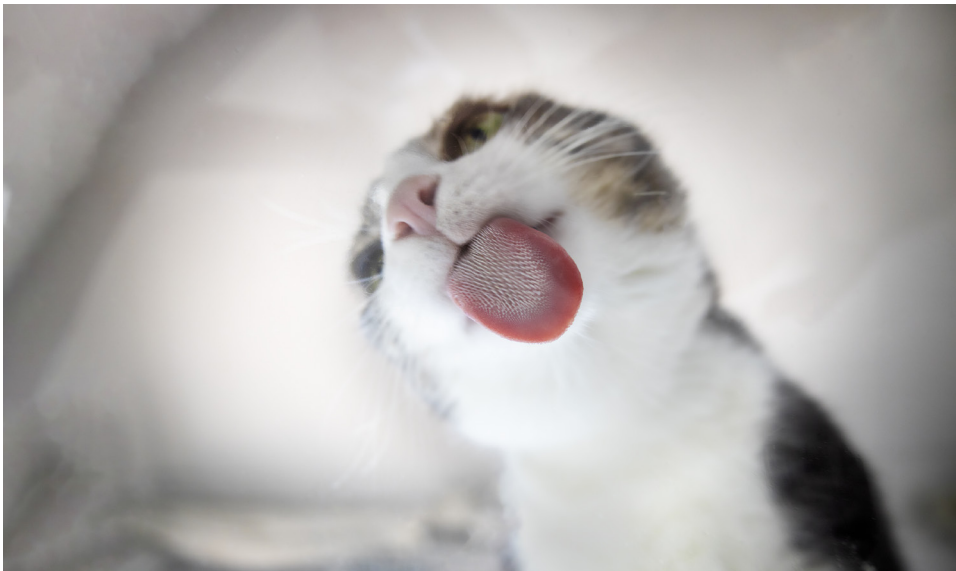
Were his eyes... had they always been that color? It seemed hard to remember. "I am not a cat," he told his eyes, and they gazed back questioningly. He swallowed a sleeping pill with a chug of pepto.

His dreams were filled with the talk show hosts. "Say it again! Say the line!" "What line?" He asked, over and over again. But they didn't seem to hear him. "Say the line!" They shouted. "WHAT LINE?" He begged them, he was practically screaming now, though it sounded more like hissing.

He woke covered in sweat. No, it wasn't sweat it was blankets. Too many damn blankets. He wrestled them off and went to the kitchen for a glass of water. He stared at his vague outline in the kitchen window. It was hard to see much of anything in the dark, but still. "Well, I'm NOT," he said huffily, and took a big gulp. Then he coughed. He coughed and coughed and coughed. He kept coughing but whatever it was wouldn't come out. He hacked and got down on the floor, throwing his whole body into the task. At last, a furball came out.

"I'm not a cat," the man said quietly, to no one in particular. It felt good to finally say it out loud.

PHOTO BY ANASTASIA GRUYKANOVA



creative

Firstly, if this story confuses you, please Google "cat lawyer feb 2021." Then this story will make a little more sense. That's pretty much what inspired me. I haven't written a short story in over a decade, but something about that cat

filter just opened me up. I guess you never know. Basically, I'm as surprised as you that these words came out of me (probably more, because, for all you know, I write this kind of weird shit daily). (I don't.)

When I'm not watching silly videos on the internet, you can find me working as a body

liberation coach. I offer private and group coaching for people who want to heal their relationship with negative body image and food. I'm also the host of the Body Love Open Mic and weekly mini body love dance parties. Come join me, www.taliacoopercoaching.com. Also noteworthy: I am not a cat.



Emerge, mixed media

Beth Ann Short

creative

I AM A WITNESS.

I have seen and experienced more than one person's share. Childhood did not afford me a time of innocence, but the arts and nature were always a refuge. My father was an artist/creative and art materials in my environment were a norm. Our family's experiences of good or bad were intense and usually managed

with an unsettling bravado. Because of this I began creating process driven art and writing to make sense of what I was undergoing. The marriage of words and images has evolved into art journaling, which often stimulates my larger works. From childhood, to adolescence and into adulthood I have continued to witness and experience chaos

and trauma. Life now is what I have made it. Full of people I choose, love, creativity, laughter, peace, bike-riding, and dogs. I have found home and have been in Portland, Oregon since 1992, the longest I have ever lived anywhere. As a licensed art therapist I am able to provide a safe place for my clients to externalize feelings and thoughts for which



Beth Ann Short (CONTINUED)

Navigating the Future, mixed media

they may not have words. Providing a place to be heard and honored. While I was an artist before I was an art therapist, my role as clinician personifies my role of witness.

Process driven art making is contrary to what I learned in art school. In school we learned about the properties of media and how to manipulate it. Critiques focused on the formal elements of art and how students ought to implement them to define their creative voice. However, art history activated my curiosity in artist's narratives. Seeing the creative risks certain artists took responding to life's events reinforced the process-driven approach

to which I have been gravitating. Allowing the process to drive the experience "bore witness" to the applicability and validity of this approach for me personally. My own art has become a testimony of my experiences, often influenced by the sociopolitical and interpersonal sensitivities that I feel or am witness to. I aspire for my work to inspire, to be a place to honor life's challenges as both inevitable and as a catalyst for personal insight and positive growth.

During my studies I fell in love with the forgiving qualities of chalk pastels, the hidden potential pushing the media layer upon layer. This love

led me to paint and mixed media. I developed my own encaustic technique, replacing toxic pigments with crayons donated to my studio instead. My method of creating these evocative pieces is organic and involves being present with my feelings and thoughts throughout the creative process. Pieces have esoteric themes that I meditate on as I work which adds an air of unpredictability and mystery to each. Sometimes haunted figures or creatures emerge. Often lush music plays its part while I work, becoming an ally in my practice creating thought-provoking works to share with others.



COVID BLUES

Deb Wallwork



Deb Wallwork

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Deb Wallwork

COVID BLUES

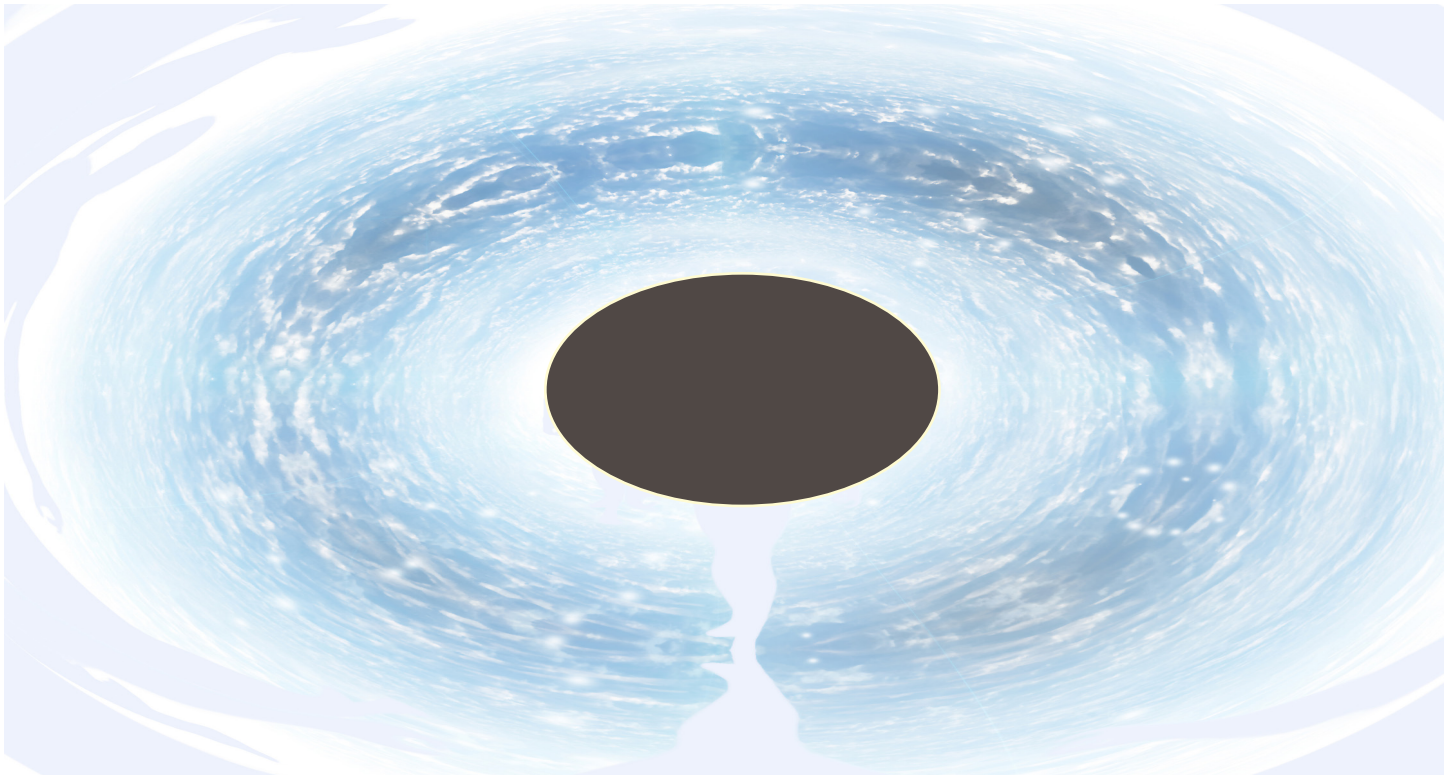
I bought a bag of cotton gloves. That was before the masks, when the breweries started making hand sanitizer and we were afraid of other people in the grocery store. Rice was scarcer than toilet paper. We bought yellow peas. We bought stamps. We bought bird seed and then another feeder. We played a lot of John Prine. The deer became bold and walked openly down the street. I came up with a quarantine cocktail; elderberry juice, gin, and quinine and we toasted each other over Zoom. It was at Home Depot that I found myself drawn toward a wall of water and immersed myself in that blue like a swimming pool.

I can't breathe.

Someone set multiple fires in the woods by our house. I can feel tears in that water, in the sky just before night falls, in the sign on someone's car. When we travel, we bring our own water. With my grandmother's Singer, we made masks from old button down shirts using patterns we found on youtube. John left his job. The needle wouldn't penetrate all the layers. Arteries are red, veins are blue. Magoo got it. Jean got it. Mike got it. Niibi is the word for water in Ojibwe, I wrote. The needle on the stereo sings Angel from Montgomery. We teeter on the edge of our own busted dam.

Deb Wallwork

COVID BLUES



Journey in a Tunnel of Light

by Jeremy Koehl

“Just keep walking,” Mom says, as we hold hands and walk and walk. They say there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is no light at the end of this tunnel.

Shanice, my baby sister is in the middle and Mom and I hold her hands on each side. There are a million tiny shimmering lights around us. Wow, I’ve never seen this many lights! I look up and these lights make an arch, way above us. It’s like a high ceiling in a church. I think that Dad called that kind of church, a cathedral. As we walk, I have a floaty feeling, like at a carnival ride. That was fun on that ride.

I wonder, where are we going? What is at the end of this tunnel? I hope something good.

Except for glances at us, Mom keeps her eyes ahead on that inky black nothingness. It seems very far away. I like the lights, but they don’t really illuminate us. If you could see us, we’re just silhouettes.

Shanice is squeezing my hand too tightly. Probably because she’s scared. Does she even understand what

happened? Does she really even remember what happened?

It is strange. We were on our way to see Dad in the hospital. Mom was worried. She said we might have to see him through glass. I had wondered, how sick was he? Would he be okay? He is the healthiest and strongest man I know.

The twinkling lights are kind of like stars. I look for the constellations Dad taught me. They’re pretty, but I don’t even see the big dipper. This is kind of exciting. Like we’re on an adventure. It gives me goosebumps. We walk and walk.

It happened suddenly. Mom screamed. Shanice and I were whirling upside down in a snowstorm of glass. I could smell something burning. A deafening roar, then a silent emptiness.

Now we can’t be with Dad. When he needs us most. I miss him already. Who will help me with my homework? Or teach me the names of insects and flowers? Or bird calls? He will surely miss me too. I



shouldn't hope he will die, but then maybe I'd see him again soon. Mom and Sis would like that too. The lights keep twinkling. I like the lights.

"Just keep walking," Mom says, as we hold hands and walk and walk.

The lights are pretty, but I'm curious, so I close my eyes. The floaty feeling gets stronger. It feels like I'm almost weightless. Awesome! But I can still hear we are shuffling along. Our feet gliding on deep velvet.

I wonder, How's dad? What are we doing?

My eyes are still closed. Why not, there is nothing to run into and we're holding hands. In my mind's eye I

start to see an old person. It is a very old lady. Grandma? She is floating, too! No, she smiles and shakes her head, not Grandma.

I am startled and open my eyes.. The tunnel is still here, lights are still here, we're still here. Mom is still staring straight ahead. Shanice's eyes are huge. Wide open. Like she's gathering all the light she can.

I wonder if I'm in a dream, but I'm not waking up. I close my eyes again. The old woman is still there. She has kind eyes, like my Grandma. I wish she was my Grandma. I'd like to see her, but she died last year. This old woman has so many wrinkles on her face, but

when she smiles they kind of disappear. She has a hat with wings. It's cool, but I've never seen that logo or style before.

I ask, "Where are we going?"

"Where would you like to go?"

She whispers.

"I'm tired. Somewhere we can rest, but my mom said we should keep walking."

"OK," she says silently with her mouth.

"To heaven?"

"Is that what you think?" When she speaks it kind of echoes in my head.

"I-I don't know. Who are you?"

"I have had many names, but you can call me Hermina."

"OK, Hermina, but where are we going?"

Softly she says, "Where would you like to go, sweetheart?"

Are all three of us going to be there?"

"That depends, dear."

"On what?"

"On what you believe."

"Are we ghosts?"

"Is that what you think?"

"No, I don't believe in ghosts, oh, I've heard there's re-creation."

"Do you mean reincarnation?"

"That sounds like a flower, but yeah, I guess so."

"Is that what you believe will happen?"

"I-I don't know."

"Well, you will have to decide," she says kindly.

I'm confused, so I peek with one eye. We are still together, walking.

I close my eyes. We are in a huge green meadow. There is tall grass, daisies and other wildflowers as far as my eyes can see. Way off in the distance there are trees of all the greens I know and more. Some look like they are in bloom. Nearby, I hear and spy a noisy little brook. Tiny green frogs sit on lily pads with iridescent dragonflies hover-

ing and swooping above. Butterflies of every color dart and drift on the light breeze. I gaze up at bright billowing clouds drifting by. Changing from springing stallions to a towering magnificent dragon. The sun feels warm on my skin. I can hear a meadowlark, other birds dance and glide around me. The flowers and grass smell wonderful. Mom, Shanice and I are running in bare feet. Dad is waving to us from across the field.

Then I hear voices

"How is this child doing?"

"It's hard to say, serious, multiple injuries."

"In an accident?"

"Yes, amazingly, the others are okay."

"Will she make it?"

"I'd say its about fifty-fifty."

Then I recall, she asked me what I believe.

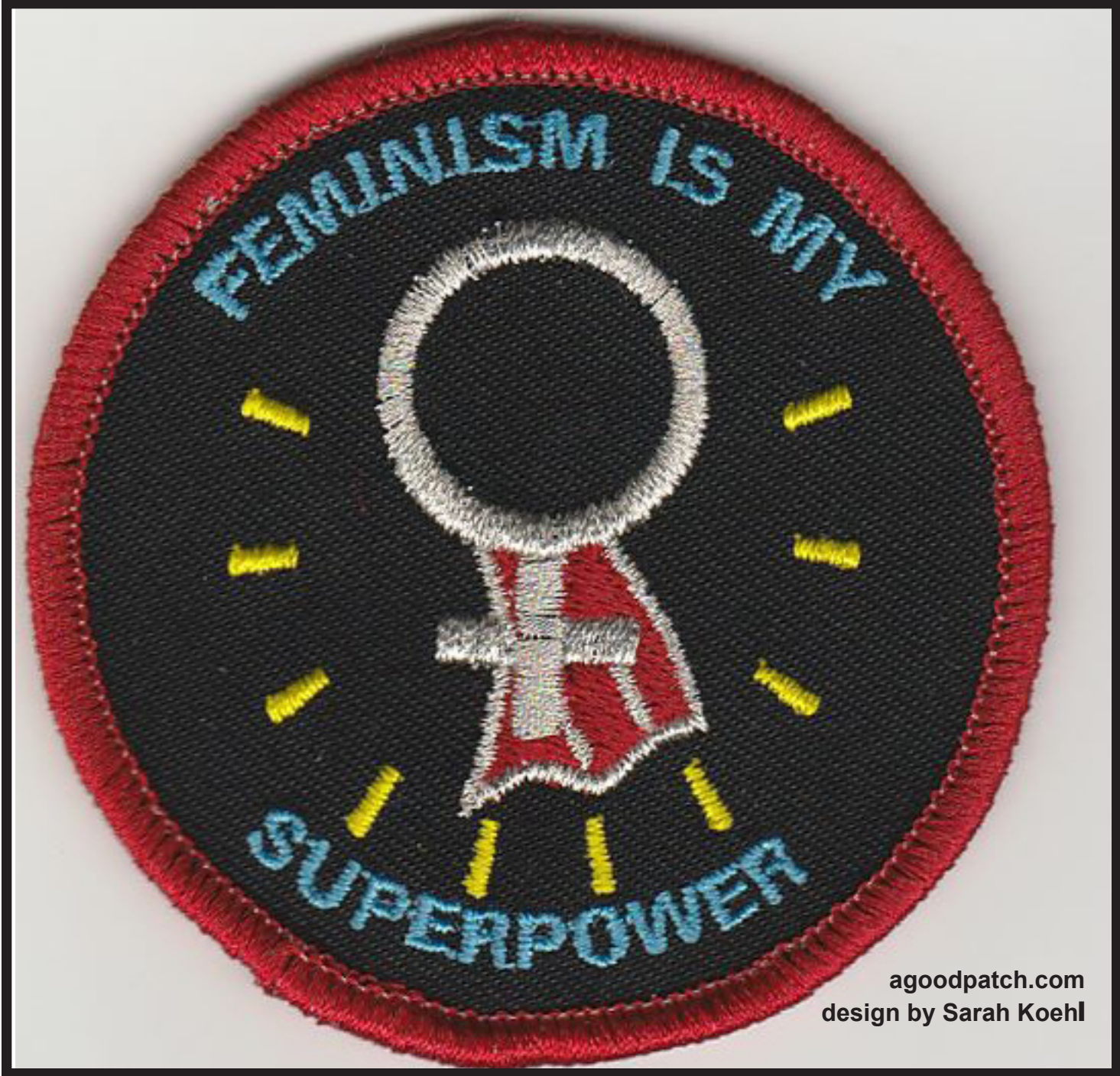
PHOTO BY YANIKAP



creative

Jeremy Koehl

Jeremy is a retired mental health and AODA therapist/counselor. Two years ago he took a class in Improv. He really liked the teacher, so when she offered a class in writing he took that as well and has been in her classes ever since. He's in the process of writing a fantasy novel inspired by *Wind in the Willows* and a memoir of special moments of his life. But this story came out of a writing class prompt and then kept growing and evolving. Jeremy is also a musician, he plays the guitar and sings covers as well as his own compositions.



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