Resilience & Recovery

The Wordsfest QuaranZine
Welcome to the Wordsfest QuaranZine, a publication born out of a partnership among Words, Western University, Writing Studies at Western, and Fanshawe College. Our goal this year was to provide writers a space in which to address the experiences of the pandemic and to begin to look beyond it. We put out the following call for poetry, prose, and artwork that explored the pandemic and the possibilities of a post-pandemic world, that traced the many paths we have taken to this moment, and reached beyond it, charting new futures and new ways of living, that, in the words of Arundati Roy, dared to “break with the past [to] imagine [the] world anew.”

We asked writers and artists to reassure us, to teach us new ways to see the world we inhabit and the future which will soon be our present, and the works we received did just that. The contents of the QuaranZine are often mournful. The reader will encounter loss, death, and various forms of trauma. But there is a thread of hopefulness that runs through every piece in this Zine, no matter how mournful: in the face of everything that has happened over the past year, we have kept writing and drawing, we have kept making art. And it is in this making, in the durability of our creativity, that we can see the possibility of a better future.

An ambitious project of this nature could not have happened without a lot of coordinating efforts. Wordsfest QuaranZine would like to thank all of the Wordsfest organizers, and, in particular, Josh Lambier, of the Public Humanities Program at Western.

We would also like to thank Antler River Poetry, for promoting the QuaranZine; Kathleen Fraser, of Western’s English and Writing Studies, for facilitating student and faculty involvement in this project; Jessica Bugorski, of Fanshawe College, for sponsoring the printing of the QuaranZine; and the many energetic and dedicated Wordsfest QuaranZine volunteers.

We are grateful for the many sponsors of Words, including the London Arts Council, who make the festival possible.

Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for the QuaranZine: thank you!
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Poetics: The Unlocking
By Honey Novick

Adjusting my eyes to the same as it never was
unlocking the door, gingerly
stepping out, going forward into the new reality.

The unlocking sometimes felt zoological
like an animal leaving its comfort
other times, like lolling in an immersion tank
knowing nothing lasts forever
other times it almost felt surreal.

The almost normal expressed itself in poetic uttering
mine, Dylan’s, Cohen’s, others

through these poetics I found my song
keening, breathing, intoning, humming
chanting, vocalizing vocables
harmonic infusion of a soul daring to survive
surfing the cloaked waves of humanity, of faith
wounded, not decimated.

“Adjusting my eyes to the same as it never was”

The ideals of March, 2020, on the eve of the unprecedented Global Pandemic
not expecting it to last beyond two weeks
I didn’t expect it would last and reshape the world as I knew it
forced to be vigilant in taking care of my mental health, my physical
being, my spirit.

Slowly, invisible, and sometimes manifestly visible
universal forces appeared.
Roz on Vaughan Road telling me to go get food at the Stop on St. Clair,
my wonderful red Toyota “chariot” chauffeuring me to the lake
where rolling tides and the horizon comforted me
as if it were my own Mother’s heartbeat;
Mimi imploring me to come line dancing on the street where Donna’s
approach to teaching, acceptance of everyone, gave insights into the
human condition and to my own body;
Ruthie J who came to sing Dylan’s, “Lay Down Your Weary Tune;”
Ruthie J, Adam, and Al sang with me in the park every week
as my fractured ankle healed.
Ruth S’s constant encouragement as we wrote 2 books
“I’m Mad (I Matter, Making A Difference)” and “Poemdemic.”

The days of lockdown went on and on
forcing me to confront my loneliness, my aloneness
while learning that victory favors those who forebear.

Daily, I looked in the mirror, seeing someone who looked like me
it was my own image, my aging visage,
do I like her or not? My choice. No choice.

Like winning the lottery, I enrolled in a cooking program
where food, the great stabilizer, became the imperial metaphor
with each recipe, every ingredient, I learned thankfulness.
“Arigatai” as the Japanese say, means “welcome, gracious.”
I held on to that thread of consciousness
pulled it as I would in a tug of war
building my spirit muscles, keeping my humanity real
giving myself permission to “kvetch” (Yiddish: to press, squeeze)
complain, then allow it to vanish.

I looked for beauty and found it everywhere
a turn of a phrase, the rising of the sun
making my bed each and every morning
the colours of nature and the sounds of the unseen.

Erecting a castle of hope with each find
getting rid of past hurts and misunderstandings
like my enslaved ancestors in Egypt building the Pyramids
I would survive believing
all would be remarkably beautiful
we would all imbibe enduring hope
pass it on, one smile at a time.

“I looked for beauty and found it everywhere”
Whether earthly or psychic
There’s a rhythm to a storm.
Sensitive souls feel it first in their bones,
Then a slight shift in the breeze
Rising wind on a fine day.
Darkening clouds begin to gather
Far-off rumble, flashes in the distance.
First drops, shelter sought on the run.
A blinding bolt, a breath later
The first ferocious crack splitting the air
Bringing sheets of rain, streets turned to streams,
Howling gale whipping mighty oaks
One and all helpless before the
Gathering, endless-seeming power and fury.

Then, not noticed till passed,
An inflection point,
A fragile diminution of the deluge,
A subtle brightening suffusing the air.
Flash and clap separate and fade
Recovery gathers force
Kinder drafts move in
Sun reasserts herself
Birdsong heralds storm’s end.
In its wake broken branches,
Or perhaps worse, or perhaps simply
A memory at once unforgettable and unreal.

“Recovery gathers force
Kinder drafts move in”
Bravest acts are not necessarily witnessed or given medals but transpire unseen as the scattered fearful army of overwrought souls rises once more to battle with another day.

“once more to battle with another day”
Défier

Liberté, dignité, intégrité.
Femme! Ta féminité les intimides,
Car tu es une femme intrépide
Qui fait gaffe aux hommes perfides.
La plupart du temps tu es incomprise
Ils te méprisent
Ils te veulent soumise
Ils te veulent fragile et docile
Ils cherchent toujours ton talon d’Achille

Defy

Liberty, dignity, integrity
Lady, your femininity intimidates them
They behave as if you were the root and stem of their biggest problem
For them you need to comply to the patriarchal system
They hate you, because you are bold
They hate you, because you break the mold
For them, you need to be fragile and docile
For them, “frailty thy name is woman”
They are always searching for your Achilles heel
Little do they know… you are a woman made of steel
Vaccinate Me
By Julian Matthews

Please, please vaccinate me from your xenophobia
Your casual labelling of the "China" virus and ethnophaulisms
As if a virus recognises your nationalism
As if a vaccine can tell your exceptionalism from your patriotism

Please immunize me from your discrimination
Give it to me once in the arm, another in the bum
As if my mooning can cause you religious harm
As if this eastern sun can just eclipse and come undone

Please, please inject me against your unconscious racism
Purge me of your prescribed prejudice and toss it in a bin
As if this melanin was oh-so-paper-thin
As if it could be washed off like your undocumented sins

Please inoculate me from your excused ignorance
Save me from all this factored-in fake tolerance
As if my code-switching didn't just multiply your dominance
As if your divide-and-rule could subtract my existence

Please, please puncture my skin and go further in
Push through your other-ing and go deeper within
As if ridding the world of this one scourge, will make us treat each other equally
like human beings
As if we will ever acknowledge we are both the virus and the vaccine

“Please, please vaccinate me from your xenophobia”
Daedalus' Quill
By Julian Matthews

The fast cars you invented sit in unmanned garages,
fossilizing, just like the fuels they fed on.
The great ships you built are adrift in the ocean,
silent arks with no flood coming.
Your jets lie in formation on cold tarmacs,
deplaned and pilotless.

Perhaps it is never too late to learn the lesson of Icarus.
We are all mere passengers
that flew too close to the sun
not respecting its mighty benevolence.

Yet the rivers still flow.
The mountains still stand tall.
The trees still reach out and grow.
The seas will constant waves to the shore.

And yet you wonder—
as the ghost ship of a million souls
leaves this broken harbour,
as the birds take wing outside your window,
as the weeds grow under your feet—
why you are still alive?

Even Daedalus kept on inventing
and reinventing after the burial.
The wax, still warm on his weathered hands,
filled up a lone feather with his inky tears
and turned it into a quill.

“the rivers still flow”

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Loss
By Donald B. Campbell

3:00 a.m.
a phone call
splits the world into
Before
and after

fingers made of ice
reach down my throat
find the warmest flesh
squeeze
and pull
until her face
screams out of my mouth
and disappears

“a phone call
splits the world”
The Closet
By Kim Totten

let's talk about this closet
where my bones are
with all the secrets
of my past life
really more like a pile of dust or ashes
I moved on but forgot
to move out
of the closet
today I rearranged
the furniture
did some dusting
I left the ashes
undisturbed
it seemed disrespectful
to sweep up history
pain does eventually
settle like dust
in a closet

“pain does eventually
settle like dust”
Symbiosis
By Kim Totten

we are the Earth
we are stardust
particles in the wind
ashes in fire
droplets of the sky
essence of the clouds
symbiotic
rooted
strong
one
we are one
strong
rooted
symbiotic
clouds
the essence of the sky
droplets of fire
from ashes
wind in the particles
stardust
we are the Earth

“we are the Earth”
I've Forgotten the Sound of Good News
By Denise Callcott

Everything I hear is a soiled remnant
of what it once was
a broken spoke on a wheel long rusted
into uselessness

and I’ve forgotten
the sound of good news.

When I part the foliage of
another headline
or cascade among the roots of
yet another story
I am not baffled by the noise
itself, but that there is so much of
it.

This is our dystopian grudge
come alive in
chronic sleeplessness, borne
by the wide-eyed symphony
of the 11 o'clock news,
the sparsely-phrased twitter feed,
the viral sick.

I know what I can do:
dive into the aggravated clamour
and add my ruthless scream—
the oily marks left on my keyboard
evidence of coercion—

or I can find the silhouette of hope
roughly sketched in our
buried cognition;

enough, perhaps, to remember
the sound of good news.

“I can find the silhouette of hope”
Ripples
By Denise Callcott

My brothers and sisters,
we are similar to your kind:
we travel, like you
often in a hurry
interrupted by impediments
natural and manufactured
on our journeys to the shore.

Our differences to you lie
in the motives of our movements
for while we jump and sway in
harmony with the musings of the
water,
you perpetually resist,
and therefore your waves are drawn
in endlessly dangerous directions
always pitted against the earth
instead of tracing her natural lines.

Why do you do this, you silly fools?
What do you gain with these
festering methods?

They are as unsustainable as
you’ve always feared
and you will be changed by them.

“you will be changed by them”
How Poems Work
By Aunty Sabby

I don’t know how poems work
but they seem to gush out of engorged, cavernous envelopes
addressed to welcoming, lustful eyes.

I don’t know how poems work
but some are made to sit in the waiting room
until their name is called
those unrelenting
seek treatment and come out fixed
after excessive prodding and diagnosis.

I don’t know how poems work
but they can steal inaugurations instead of elections
hearts instead of bases
intricacies instead of controversies.

Poems steal the show.

Poems stage protests without ever clapping picket signs or walking the streets
or roaring chants,
yet their dissent is far from silent.

I don’t know how poems work
but they seem to take stark reality
and the morass of souls both tortured and … more tortured
without colonizing them.

Poems nudge like a chin in a cuddle
forced the other direction
others slap you hard into a realistic state of discomfort
when complacency from creature comforts
overtake stark social reality.

I don’t know how poems work
but they seem to give hope by conscious injection
into untrained eyes,
blind to how others feel.

Poems don’t necessarily fix anything,
they only liberate through permissive alchemy.

“their dissent is far from silent”
Again,
she asked me: why?
When I unraveled my lips
into the flat sentence,
“I don’t want to marry you anymore.”
We’re here, she said.
Why are you there?
What else is there?
When the past was built
on uncertain futures,
overflowing disease, death,
isoaltion.
The smell of my voice was rotten,
decaying the flower
we grew in the ashes
of an apartment.
The bridge over the lake
that bonded us
distanced us, broken.
And here we descend,
Oh, we’re alone
Again.

“When the past was built
on uncertain futures”
Breakfast
By Gareth Boyle

I told her
She was an angel
When her phone said
Bonjour
At 5AM.
Wrapped in sheets
Too small
For both of us,
The taste of cigarettes
Remains
On her lips.
She rests them
Against mine,
Inhaling me.
I say
Goodbye.
I like her
Flavour.

“I say
Goodbye”
I Have this Way of Being
By Sofia Spagnuolo

I love to love,
but only when I accept
it will end in heartbreak.

I love to read
and feel the flimsy pages
between my thumbs,
but I can’t seem to finish a book
no matter how hard I try.

I love the feeling of warm tea,
but only in the summertime
under the scorching sun.

I love driving with the windows down,
but only when it’s freezing outside
and my legs feel numb.

I love the sound
of my fingers plucking
the strings of a wooden guitar,
but only when I am surrounded by loving faces.

It’s lonely without the faces.

I love waking up
with the sun beaming
on my face,
but only when there’s
an empty space
beside me.

And I love to feel at home,
but only when I’m anywhere
but here.

I just,
have this way of being.

“I love to love”
Viridescence
By Michael Schmidt

For the first time in a long time,

I went for a long walk outside today,
And it got me thinking about the colour green.

Nature’s purest hue was everywhere in sight:
The leaves, the grass, the shrubs—everything was green.

My relaxed stroll took place inside a park,
Which had benches and trash bins painted green.

The presence of this vivid, vivacious hue
Was overpowering, and it made me green.

At one point I passed a pair of fluffy dogs,
Her collar was turquoise, his eyes were green.

Then I saw a pair of squirrels run by,
In their mouths they carried acorns, still green.

All this was too much to bear, and my stomach
Began to rumble; I puked up something green.

What is the matter with green, you may ask?
Only that it’s too much of one thing—too much of green.

“All this was too much to bear”
sandman
By Momil Azam

my calico steps
on my ribcage, meowing,
signalling that it is time
for me to feed her.
i rub the sleep from my eyes—
kisses from none other
than mr. sandman himself
on the corners of
my tired, drowsy eyelids.

it is march 2020,
the world is alive yet dead.
i take my blanket,
turn over and go to sleep.

“it is march 2020,
the world is alive yet dead”
Your blue eyes sailed to me across an ocean that my brown eyes will never see. Your mouth comforted me in my ancient tongue, and sometimes in your Viking tongue, storied from birth and gritty in my ears. A remnant of your own invaded land.

Strange-throated companions. Strange we are, together.

Now your eyes are shut tight against the earth that fills your mouth and ceases, seizes, all, all, all.

That’s no way to say goodbye.

My fault, though, for not paying attention to Raven on the roof, peering in at our happiness like they had a right to be there, pretending to be Crow, beak in my ear, dangerously close.

Speaking Crow, Murder of Crows, Murder, Death, Dead.

They read your eulogy in Cree, my tongue, your god.

And now I am alone, with six babies, scattered, shattered.

“Strange we are, together.”
Crow
By Hilary McDonnell
When I turned seventy-seven in August this year, I knew I was in for transition, since seven represents change for me. But little did I know my beloved husband would be sent to hospital a week later and would a month later die. Seventy-seven so far has proved to be a season of immense shift and swerves as I learn to live alone again in the house we so sweetly shared. In contemplating my new life—however different from the old age I'd hoped to live out with him—consolation comes with grandchildren, their joys and lively presence, and in the unexpected freedom to become the elder I have long prepared for.
We held her funeral in the backyard. In late May, the smell of the fresh-bloomed flowers sits heavy in the air, and fat bees bumble from one blossom to another, moving slowly through the air. Thirty of my close relatives spread out over the patio deck, all dressed in black despite the heat beating down from the noon sun.

Two days ago, we had picked up my grandmother’s ashes from the funeral home. It was cold and stagnant, a room with white-washed walls and worn-out carpet. Artificial flowers sat mounted on the pillar beside the one her ashes were on. My mother had balked at the doorway, deciding then that the funeral could not be held in that awful stagnant room. Only two of us had been allowed in to pick up her ashes, only two out of so many who loved her. COVID restrictions sat heavily on the funeral service they offered us: ten people in the room, including a priest. Not even enough room for all of her grandchildren to say goodbye.

On the red patio stone in my grandmother’s backyard, my relatives wander around. There is something achingly familiar in the crush of their bodies hugging me, something that holds me together as everything breaks apart. I can trace back my features through the mix of all their faces. I can piece together my grandmother through my aunt’s blue eyes, my cousin’s long nose.

No one had seen my grandmother in the months before she died. It had only been my family and a stream of masked and gloved hospice nurses. Sitting underneath the warm sun, surrounded by her garden, I can almost remember her the way the rest of my relatives can: vibrant, warm, full of life.

The smell of fresh-cut grass and the trills of singing birds undercut my sister as she begins reading the eulogy I wrote. When her voice breaks, there is an underlying bird call to fill the silence. Beneath my legs, the wrought-iron chair is hot, the sun beating down on my scalp. Fat, purple peonies wave to us from her garden, their petals exploding out of the stems like confetti.

My mask sticks to my face, damp and cloying. Everyone else is the same, their breaths heaving in the thick air, masks blowing out with their quiet sobs. Yet, when I tip my head back and take a deep breath, there is nothing that reminds me more of my grandmother than the air on a hot spring day. The heat hugs my skin; it warms even the tears on my cheeks. Above my head, her red dogwood sheds some of its blossoms, showering us with buds of new life. Her urn glints in the sun, and, when the light sparkles off of the engraved butterflies, it looks like they, too, are leaping off and launching into flight.

“they, too, are leaping off and launching into flight”
Introvert’s Lockdown Sestina
By Lisa Kovac

This lockdown life should suit me: I’m a home body; I long for more and more slow time to read, to write, to sit and pet my dog, to walk in worship the expanding space of spring. My fuel-fumed, rumbling ride to work becomes an extra hour to email friends.

I’d rather cluster with a few close friends by phone than fail at mingling in the home of a cousin’s new neighbour. I start work on waking, finish by four, and have time to write more poems, read Proust, dream of space flight, practise French, finally train the dog to come when called, finally train the dog to stop barking at the sight of all my friends. I can’t hug them with six full feet of space between us, but they still get barked at. Home is less hospitable: gone is the time of sharing shade and chocolate bars. I work, have FaceTime lunch, work, read, write, eat, sleep, work, have FaceTime lunch, work, read, eat, watch the dog chase leaves, cannot think why to write. Slow time clicks by in cursor blinks. Phone calls with friends fray as we find few talking points at home, and too much fear abroad. The cold, clear space

“Slow time clicks by in cursor blinks”
my skis once skimmed through is forbidden space. So is my Nana’s house at Christmas. Work has taken the rooms of refuge in my home hostage: the window once staffed by the dog is office space. I visit choir friends through Zoom: only one speaker at a time.

I Zoom to writing workshops. I have time for moulding manuscripts. The silent space between me and an old Vancouver friend shrinks. During a mid-morning break from work, I spend ten minutes cuddling the dog. His tail wags all day long: his human’s home.

As lockdown loosens, there’s still time to work out rhymes, space to sing as I walk the dog, and warmth to welcome friends into my home.

“As lockdown loosens, there’s still time to work out rhymes, space to sing”
Cookies
By Sammy Orlowski

I don't think
you're ready
For how many

COOKIES

I will make for you
When the coast is clear
Come over to my house
We will feast on friendship
And granulated sugar
Until we turn into stars
“Her inheritance?” you asked.
Do not ask her a question you are not ready to hear the honest response to.
She is mixed, both sides of history in her,
the colonizers and the colonized intertwined,
fighting inside, unable to reconcile.
Trying hard to break her into pieces,
the unspoken privilege that comes with a lighter skin,
the so-called “good hair” and having a white foreign mother.

The
resilience and happiness inherited from her black father.
Pride to call herself black, even though she is technically brown.
Strength to keep going, even if society insists on denying her a fair shot.
Imposed perfectionism as a way of being recognized,
by a society who hates the ones who look like her.

Her white mother wanting her to succeed in an unfair world,
killing her slowly, guiding her to mental exhaustion,
making her work twice as hard as everyone else, just to be respected.
Nothing ever good enough.
Her black father, absent most of the time,
working long hours, travelling, in an effort to please his beautiful wife.

Her white mother, constantly criticizing her looks.
She, one of the two brown daughters,
born out of a beautiful love story.
Guilty only of resembling too closely her black dad.
Her features too ethnic for her momma’s liking.
Nose too wide, lips too full to wear red lipstick,
body too voluptuous for her age, feet too large,
hair too curly with a mind of its own,
some of the items in the list,
most, she could not change no matter how hard she tries.

“Strength to keep going, even if society insists on denying her”
She
desperately trying to modify her appearance,
craving the unconditional maternal love she never got,
convinced something is wrong with her
overperforming everywhere she goes
just to prove that she is worthy of love.

No one taught her white mother how to love people that look like her.
Her mother unable to teach her how to love her brown self,
instead, teaching her how to survive, act and make herself closer to the colonizers,
in a desperate attempt to make her successful and more accepted in the white world she
lives.

“Her inheritance?” you dare to ask again,
wanting her to give you part of herself.
She is a vivid example of the colonization of our minds
by the ones who are supposed to love us the most.
Struggling to keep her safe,
her mother did the best she could at the time,
knowing well the atrocities the dominant class is capable of.

She
condemned at birth.
Too much melanin in her body,
to ever belong in her mother’s world.
She is
the answer many do not want to hear.
Lo que se sabe no se pregunta.
One does not ask what one already knows.

“Lo que se sabe no se pregunta.
One does not ask what one already knows.”
She does not want to ever forget where she came from, holding onto her accent for dear life, a silent act of rebellion, fighting to keep part of who she is, always with her.

She refuses to be assimilated, becoming someone she is not. Too proud of her heritage to negate it. A brown Caribbean Queen refusing to bow to anyone, not even herself.

Born to be a leader, an Alpha female, living frequently in longing, sadness and loneliness visiting too often for her liking, missing the only place she has ever called home.

Mourning her people, her beaches, her warm sun, her eternal summer, her aqua tides with clear water caressing her body rocking and welcoming her back as if she never left, loudness and laughs everywhere.

Wishing she could go back where she came from twenty-four years ago, full of dreams. Staying here, her only option. Standing proud and tall, the only way she knows how to exist. Longing to be accepted and loved, instead treated as an unwanted guest who overstayed her welcome by a society who focusses on her looks, forgetting to recognize all the good and amazing in so many like her.

“her warm sun, her eternal summer, her aqua tides with clear water”
Will you quarantine with me?
by Alex Barrowclough

A hundred seconds to midnight
I asked if you wanted to be with me
And then you spent three months without me.

When I finally saw you again
We spent every day playing video games
And bingeing Sex Education and Tiger King
In the stifling heat of your student housing.
We peeled our skin apart
And slept at the mercy of your fan.

After our first anniversary
We had our first date in a movie theater.
That nervous awkward feeling we got
Was only for taking our masks off to eat.

Two years later, we are on the precipice.
Our lives are revving up to begin again.
I fell for you a month before the end of the world
But if I had known I still would have asked.

When time stood still, we froze together.
We lingered in those sun-soaked mornings
With nothing better to do
Except be.

“When time stood still, we froze together”
let me introduce myself.
By Nic Bylsma

I effect most.
I'm in the rich kid, I'm in the poor kid.
I'm in the hills, I'm in the slums.
I make people feel so alone, I make people feel Happy like they love me over everything and everyone else... "Pretty cool eh".
I give people comfort in this crazy world. Comfort they'd get no where else they nickname me the quick fix, I'm still unsure how I feel with this title. I make people spend their last dollar on me but with a few strings pulled I make it affordable to all. I make the Ace student lie to his or her family to have a feeling of gratitude and fulfilment. I reck friendship of all kinds. I'm an excuse as to why I can be there. I help people let all their emotions go I help people feel numb I help people feel the breeze like they're one with nature all their dreams and everything that has passed them by doesn't matter. They can just relax their dad wanting them to be a doctor goes Way, that same kid comes home to an empty fridge.
I am violent I am sneaky.
I'm a good sales pitch... just once.. it will be fun! to really you in. I'm a liar. I'm the dad that tells his son he has no money to buy him the new hockey stick he wanted...to turn around and spend that money I said I didn't have to get high. I can be very out wordly spoken with out noticing the damage caused. I'm all for me and me alone. I like to spend time with my closest friends Depression Anxiety and loneliness and misery.
I'm like the devil,
I lie,
I mislead people and I'm working day and night...yes I love taking souls.
Ohh there's one right now
beep beep beep

I'm addiction.

If your reading this you are not alone you are loved and your family loves you. Be safe.

“you are loved and your family loves you”
Re-emergence
By Rebecca St. Pierre
She found a piece of flint shaped like a fox.

Somewhere on a trail,
In the south,
Near a riverbed buried under the leaves.

How ironic, she thought, epitome of survival, escaping its domesticated home.

Its sharp edges – foxes’ ears – would slash and gnaw at her Snapple bottle, and slice holes in her masks.

She pulled off her backpack and tossed it in with the rest of her belongings.

“She found a piece of flint shaped like a fox.”
The light is faded. 
It flickers in the distance. 
While the cloak of darkness descends, ever closer to everyday life. 
Welcome to 2020. 
Loneliness has become the most familiar feeling on the planet.

The first week was tough, the first month tougher, 
it didn’t get easier with time. New hobbies didn’t give people 
the distraction they wanted, no matter how many they tried. 
Waves of relapses, influenced by isolation were to be expected, 
they occurred as expected, as did a monsoon of overdoses.

The idea of society has all but washed out with the tide, and excitement for 
vacations replaced with the thought of going to the grocery store 
and recognizing one of the faces behind a mask. 
Don’t get too close.

It’s hard to hug your loved ones from 6 feet apart.

Simple acts like getting a coffee, now feel as if you’re checking yourself out of prison.

Much like electricity, human connection doesn’t travel well through plexiglass.

“It’s hard to hug your loved ones from 6 feet apart.”
I sit in my room while I get my degree,
Motionless, tired, dust covering me,
I haven’t been outside in three and a half weeks
Which is why every morning I take vitamin D.

Hopeless, discouraged, unhealthy and sad,
Ice cream and water are all that I’ve had,
With trips to the bathroom as my exercise,
Why did this happen in my undergrad?

Days fly by like planes on the ground,
I fall to the floor but don’t make a sound,
But pick myself up for once in my life,
The old me is dead, the new me is found.

Between my four walls the old paint is peeling,
I scrape it and scrap it and repaint with feeling,
I paint for myself, yet I stare at the ceiling,
This external fix gives me internal healing.

Maybe this was good, a chance to restart,
Through painting and veggies I had a jumpstart
To a better life when mine was falling apart,
My soul has now healed, and so has my heart.

“The old me is dead, the new me is found.”
A Quarantine Love Letter
By Meghan Kings

The pandemic is not inspiring.

There is no hidden beauty
in countless isolated moons,
huddled beside the radio and
waiting for the lockdown to end.

There is no Muse
tucked into the crowds at the supermarket,
eyes twinkling above the rim of her mask
in a smile you can never see.

There is no romanticizing
the fear, the silence, the anger,
the sadness, the loss, the hurt:
their omnipotent presence assures it.

The pandemic is not inspiring;
the stubborn, persistent survival is.

Nothing says, “I love you,”
like a midnight text from a friend,
desperate to express how very much
they’ve missed you.

Nothing says, “I love you,”
like the strangers at the store,
maintaining their distance to keep
you and them safe from each other.

And nothing says, “I love you,”
like the art that has grown -
pruned and coaxed like a garden,
ready to bear bittersweet fruit.

“There is no hidden beauty
in countless isolated moons”
The world was small
and became smaller still,
but from the crest of the third wave,
there is finally an inflection.

Battered and bruised we rise
from the ashes of the world we knew:
to be swept away,
remembered and honored,

but ultimately left behind.

“we rise
from the ashes of the world we knew”
An Improper Pandemic
By Emily Mason

I didn’t get a proper third year of university. For months, all I’ve known of this city is locked doors and masked faces. Aren’t my 20s supposed to be when I get to discover the places where I belong?

I learned to make Dalgona coffee but what I would give to be me last year, running to in-person lectures – tell her to enjoy it while it lasts.

I’d left campus one night in a rush, needing to grab my costumes and such for the final rehearsal of my dance show. Little did I know, this was the last time I’d be there for months.

My sister didn’t get a proper graduation. Somewhere in London there’s an empty banquet hall because all that was offered was a celebratory walk around the gym.

Teachers smile, all the while feeling sad for the students who can’t even shake their hands. Man, I remember the day my sister picked out that royal blue dress, now just a mess dragging against the sweat-stained floors.

“all I’ve known of this city is locked doors and masked Faces”
And it’s raining outside,
as if puddles could hide the tears
of something missing.
There is not much of anything for
the graduates of 2020.

My dad didn’t get a proper retirement.
Thirty years working at a company
just for a casual goodbye
on a Thursday.

Some say that retirement parties
are overrated but sometimes
it’s nice to be recognized for
all those nine-to-fives.

There’s no clinking of glasses
or patting of backs, as old colleagues say,
“Now you can finally relax.”
It all just ended with the signing of
an end-of-day report.

My grandpa didn’t get a proper funeral.
Having a large family doesn’t mesh well with
capacity limits – so all the grandkids
had to watch the live stream from home,
all alone in their grief.

There’s a slideshow of memories,
as if those are proper remedies for
what’s happened.
We all know that this is
no way to go, but we decide
to mask everything.

In the end, we could offer
nothing more than ten people
standing on a grey carpet floor
six feet apart.

“In the end, we could offer
nothing more”
Contributors:

Athena has been writing poems and songs for several decades now. She started writing poems and songs when she was a high school student. She writes poems in different languages but mainly in French. She was a slam coach in Mauritius, and her team even won competitions twice at the national level. She has been a member of the Scarborough poetry club since 2017, where she participated in various projects organized by the city of Toronto. She is also a versatile singer. She sings in different languages and music styles.

Momil Azam enjoys writing and reading. She dreams of being able to publish a book of her own one day.

Alex Barrowclough is a third-year English major at Western University. This submission to Wordsfest is his first time being published but hopefully far from his last!

Gareth Boyle is a third-year student at Western University, studying English Literature, Film Studies, and Creative Writing.

Nic Bysma’s experience though taking time listening to many peoples’ stories and life situations. He never judges, and this has opened door to understand standing people’s battles. His own short few year battle and friends and family’s battles. Loosing a loved one changes your life prospective. At the end of the day, we are all human. If your reading this in a struggle, know the world is not against you—your friends your family your community care about you. Lots of love: Nic Bysma.

Denise Callcott—mother of two, bookkeeper, aspiring poet and novelist—thinks the world would be a whole lot calmer if people took more walks in quiet forests and read more Virginia Woolf.

Donald B. Campbell is a Saskatoon writer and English as a Second/Additional Language teacher. His plays, short stories, and poems have been chosen in several competitions. His plays have been performed in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Josh Hick is a very determined person who has faced challenge after challenge, and he is finally ready to stop losing the game and begin his victorious streak!

Penn Kemp is a poet, performer, and playwright and has participated with delight in many “Conversation at Wordsfest,” most recently with Cornelia Hoogland, now up on https://fb.watch/9h7ATcP0YB/.

Meghan Kings is a second-year Civil Engineering student at Western University. She is passionate about creative writing and the environment, and can often be found listening to music, reading fantasy novels, or writing short stories in her spare time. This is her first published piece.

Lisa Kovac has published fiction and poetry in the 2018 and 2020 issues of the Wordsfest Zine, Corvid Queen, Enchanted Conversation, Imprints, and Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders; she is working on a collection of revisionist fairy tales.

Emily Mason is a fourth-year student at Western University pursuing an Honours Specialization in Creative Writing and English Language and Literature. In addition to her contributions to the Zine, she is also a writer for Her Campus Western and a blog writer for BoostHER.

Julian Matthews is a former journalist finding new ways to express himself in the pandemic through poetry, short stories and essays. He is published in Nine Cloud Journal, Poor Yorick Journal, Borderless Journal, Second Chance Lit, Poetry and Covid, the anthology Unmasked: Reflections on Virus-time (curated by Shamini Flint) and forthcoming in the American Journal of Poetry, Beltway Poetry Quarterly and cc&d magazine, a Scars Publication. He is based in Malaysia. Link: linktr.ee/julianmatthews
Hilary McDonell is a printmaker and poet. She graduated from Alberta College of Art in 1991 is just now reconnecting with her art practice. She is a Scottish Métis woman, born in Saskatchewan and reclaiming her Métis identity.

Patrick Nohos is a creator from Scarborough, Ontario. He is currently in his second year at Western University in the BMOS program and enjoys creating content, Frank Ocean, and long walks on the beach.

Honey Novick is a singer/songwriter/voice teacher/ poet. Her song/poems have been translated into French, Japanese, Spanish, Greek, and Urdu. She is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets and the Writer's Union of Canada and teaches through Poetry In Voice. She won the 2021 Urban Hero Award in the Arts. She has 11 books and 8 CDs and has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. Her latest chapbook “Bob Dylan, My Rabbi,” was published by the Secret Handshake Chapbook series. She is also the editor of “POEMDEMIC,” a Friendly Spike Theatre Band project.

Sammy Orlowski (she/her) is an illustrator and zinemaker based in London, Ontario. In her work, she aims to capture and explode out the absurdities of life in ways that make people laugh and feel invited to share in the nonsense.

Brianna Reeve is currently a fourth-year student at Western University majoring in Creative Writing and English. She hopes to continue on in school with a Master's in journalism and continue with her creative writing projects.

Aunty Sabby (she/her) lives on Treaty 6&7 in Red Deer, Alberta.

María Cristina Sabourin-Jovel, better known by her pen name Queen María, is a woman of mixed race who grew up in Cuba. She has lived in Canada for almost 24 years. She is extremely passionate about social justice and fighting against racism, ableism, sexism, and fatphobia. She rediscovered her passion for writing during this pandemic, after a 30-year hiatus, as part of her healing journey. She loves easily and with a full heart, giving all her heart to what she believes in.

Michael Schmidt is a fourth-year student at Western University, taking an Honours Specialization in English and Creative Writing. He lives in a quiet rural township outside of Waterloo, Ontario, and has loved writing since his childhood. He greatly enjoys reading fantasy novels and hopes to contribute something epic to the genre in the near future.

Kayla Skinner graduated from King's University with a double honours and is now doing her masters degree in counselling psychology - she writes for self-care and is an avid animal crossings fan.

Sofia Spagnuolo is a fourth-year English and Creative Writing student at Western University. She has a wide portfolio but is mostly fascinated by poetry and short stories.

Rebecca St. Pierre is a writer, photographer, and Londoner. Her work has appeared in eatdrink Magazine, ON Nature, Understorey Magazine and also on a traffic signal box at the corner of Wonderland Road and Commissioners Road.

Kim Totten is a poet, culinary & visual artist, and photographer who is most creative when surrounded by nature and tempting eats. When she is not writing, she loves hikes through the woods, wandering through farmer's markets, or curling up with her large cat and a good book. She has been known (when no one is looking) to belt out songs and dance wildly. Her works of art and poetry have been widely celebrated by a growing throng of affectionate beautiful humans. Kim currently resides in London, Ontario in a house with a huge wise oak tree and an untamed yard where squirrels, bunnies, chipmunks, and the occasional raccoon frolic. You can find her at: @kimberley.totten and @hibiscusplantbased on Instagram.
“Adjusting my eyes to the same as it never was”

-Honey Novick