



# Resilience & Recovery

The Wordsfest QuaranZine



## Introduction

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.

## Acknowledgements

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The Wordsfest QuaranZine is produced on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron (Neutral), and Wendat peoples, and publishes writers from across Turtle Island.

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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"

## Storm

By Jennifer Wenn

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”

## Bravery

By Jennifer Wenn

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/Defy

By Athena

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

“because you are bold”

## 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”

\*First published in *Sparked Literary Magazine*

## 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 clasping 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”

## Distance Makes the Heart Look Yonder

By Gareth Boyle

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,  
isolation.  
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”

1869, 22 Jan., died after coming home ill

(Hudson Bay Archives)

By Hilary McDonnell

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



## The Turn

By Penn Kemp

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.

“the unexpected  
freedom to become”

## In Her Garden

By Brianna Reeve

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 good-bye.

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.

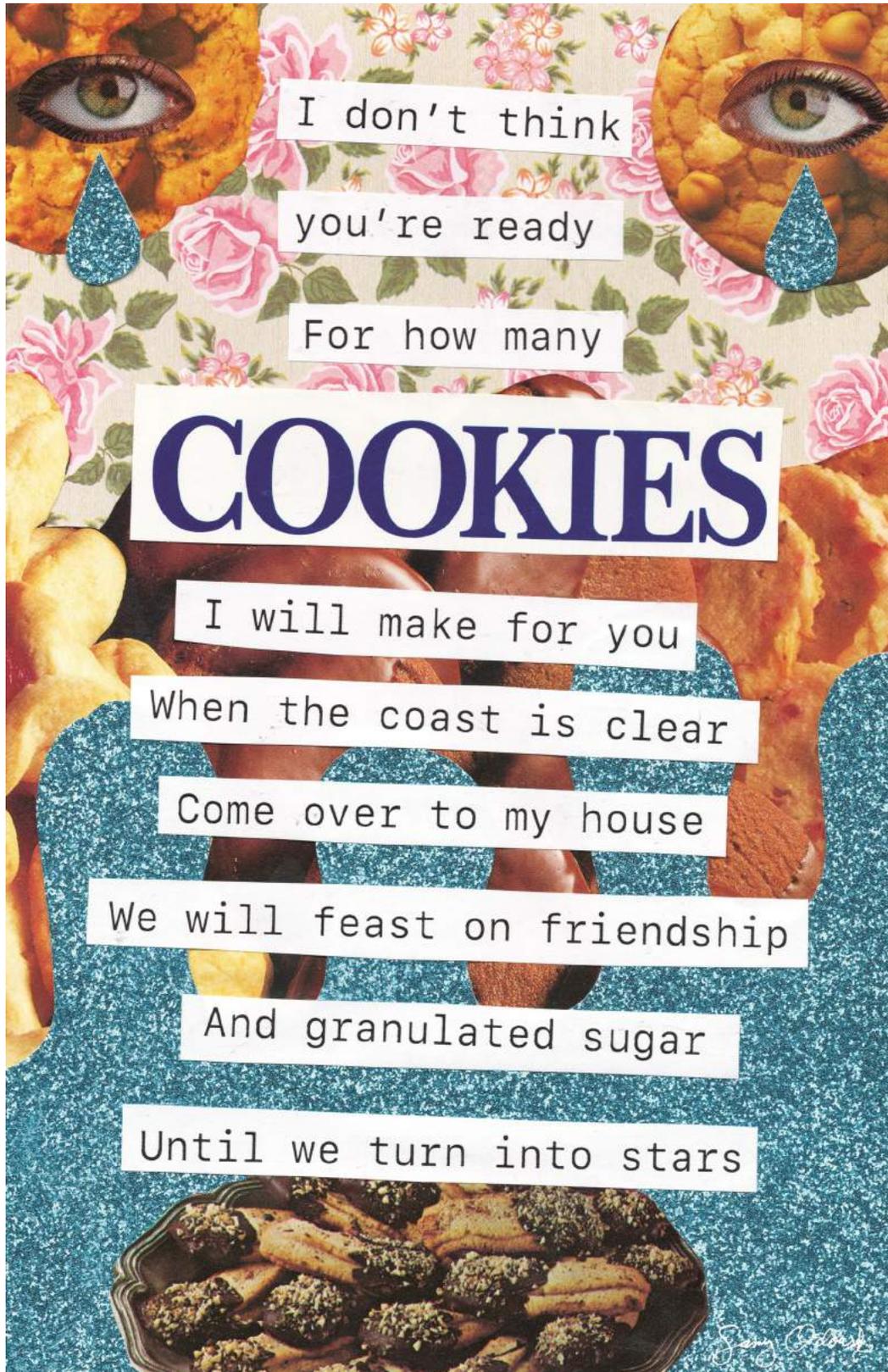
I Zoom to writing workshops. I have time  
for moulding manuscripts. The silent space  
between me and an old Vancouver friend  
shrinks. During a mid-morning break from work,  
I spend ten minutes cuddling the dog.  
His tail wags all day long: his human's home.

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



## Lo que se sabe no se pregunta

By María Cristina Sabourin-Jovel aka Queen María

*To my beautiful mother who tried her best to protect me from a savage world.  
Your best was not good enough. I forgive you.  
I will always love you mom. May you rest in peace mami!*

“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 forget

By María Cristina Sabourin-Jovel aka Queen María

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 d me the quick fix, I'm still unsure how I feel with this tittle. I make people spend their last dalor on me but with a few strings pulled I make it aforable to all. I make the Ace student lie to his or her family to have a feeling of gradatude 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 frigid.

I am violent I am sneaky.

I'm a good sales pitch... just once.. it will be fun! to reall 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 coused. I'm all for me and me alone. I like to spend time with my cloest friends Depression Anxiety and loneliness and misery.

I'm like the devil,

I lie,

I misslead 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



## Vagrant

By Kayla Skinner

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.”

## New Year, New World

By Josh Hick

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.”

## Painting In My Room

By Patrick Nohos

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 Bylsma**'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 Bylsma.

**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](http://linktr.ee/julianmatthews)

**Hilary McDonell** is a printmaker and poet. She graduated from Alberta College of Art in 1991 is just now re-connecting 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.

**Jennifer Wenn** is a trans-identified writer and speaker from London, Ontario. Her first poetry chapbook, *A Song of Milestones*, has been published by Harmonia Press (an imprint of Beliveau Books). She has also written *From Adversity to Accomplishment*, a family and social history, and published poetry in *WordCity Literary Journal*, *The Stratford Quarterly*, *Beliveau Review*, *Journey of the Heart*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Watchyourhead*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Synaeresis*, *Big Pond Rumours*, the League of Canadian Poets' *Fresh Voices*, *Wordsfestzine*, and the anthologies *Dénouement* and *Things That Matter*. She is also the proud parent of two adult children. Visit her website at <https://jenniferwennpoet.wixsite.com/home>



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

**-Honey Novick**

**words**

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