



Succulent:

A zine about caring for each other and ourselves
(in the middle of a pandemic)

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Finding Succulence

By Tiffany Sostar, April 2020. Canada.

This zine started with a plant metaphor. I wrote:

I love the comic about how we are basically houseplants with complicated feelings, and it got me thinking about how isolation means we need to be succulents, able to survive and thrive in conditions of scarcity and intensity, and how fear also turns out lives into deserts, and how precarity does the same.

So, I thought we could use that metaphor, and make a little zine about what gets us through, and how we get each other through.

What are our skills of survival?

What are our strategies of mutual aid and collective action and care?

How are we keeping ourselves going, and what can we teach each other?

Many of us are in communities with generations-long histories of succulent lives in deserts of ableism, transantagonism, queerphobia, colonialism, white supremacy. Oppressed and targeted communities know the way forward.

So many folks responded to this invitation, and what I imagined as a “little zine about what gets us through” is actually over 90 pages of poetry, art, essays, and narrative projects. I am incredibly thankful for these contributions, and honoured to have been able to bring them together in this work.

Each contributor took the time and energy to create something that they shared with this project. This time and energy is precious, especially right now as we all deal with scarcity, precarity, uncertainty, and rapidly changing expectations and pressures.

There is abundance in these pages. Richness despite scarcity.

Succulence.

Neverlings

/ˈnevə:lɪŋ/

We may need new words to describe this time, but parents have an ancient job to do.

By Brianna Sharpe, April 2020. Canada.

“Momma, are we nevering right now?” My 5-year old invented this word yesterday, but wouldn’t tell me what it means. He’s articulate, verbose even, so his lack of clarification intrigued me. Is he playing a game? Does he just not know that ‘never’ is a noun?

I actually think on some level, he’s realizing the limitations of language to describe this time in our lives. As a parent, it’s not my job to stop the world for my kids, even in a pandemic: It’s to craft beautiful containers to safely store their emotions, knowing I will carry the box when it gets too heavy. I am their answer, no matter what the question. I define the unwanted words that wrest their way into our lives. And so, my hearts, I give you this:

Nevering (Verb) /ˈnevə:lɪŋ/

The act of walking through things we never imagined, together

Never is no longer a known quantity; instead, it sheds its skin every day as we get used to more and more we didn’t see coming. I never imagined having to break my children’s hearts in stages; no granny and grandpa, no friends, no teachers, no favourite wilderness spots. My toddler turned three mid-March, and the pandemic ate her birthday party.

And while I’m shielding them from new hurts, I’m also leaning into what this means for all of us. The economy will never fully recover. Racialized communities are being policed with a viral fervour. People are being forced to isolate with their abusers. New York is digging mass graves. Just when one shock has subsided, the earth shakes again.

I've realized in parenthood that "always" is not a gift I can easily give to my kids. But I didn't anticipate having to explain the ways that "never" is becoming our daily reality—and that I don't know what's ahead.

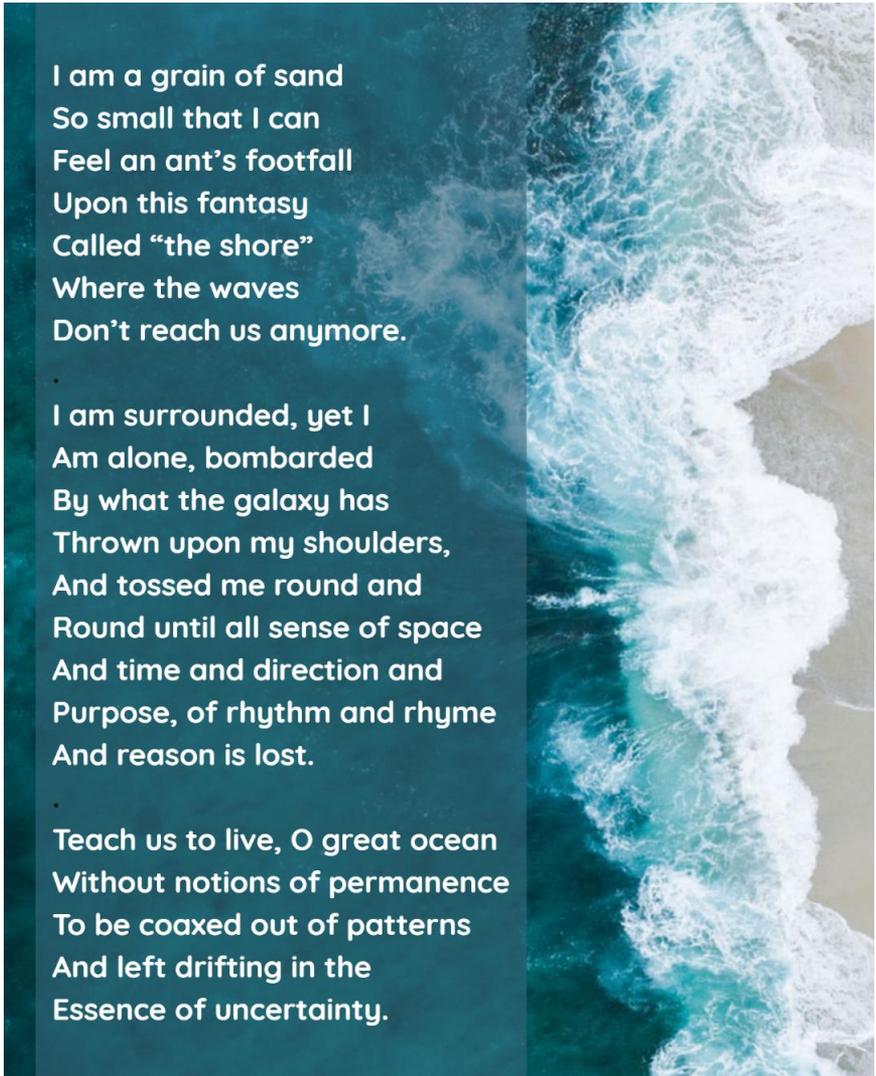
But walking into the never, it turns out, gives us a tender power. When we enter a space beyond our wildest imagination, we realize that what seemed impossible is within our grasp after all. I can bend the clock's minute-hand if we need more time to get moving. We can loll in our PJs and eat cookies for breakfast. Our backyard has become a garden of green dreams that we know will lick at the heels of our sleepy winter campfires. The whir of the highway has been replaced by the wind, shifting from soft to insistent, making us travellers of a different sort.

I won't pretend it's all cookies and campfires; far from it, the challenges have worn out their welcome. But I need to remember that I can still fill my children's tiny universe with the kind of intention that only comes from moving slowly, digging deep, and listening fully.

Like all parents, I long to keep you little forever. But the world needs your gifts in ways I never imagined—so we'll walk forward together, my neverlings.

Little Rock

By Kalina Wolska-Chaney, April 2020. Canada.

An aerial photograph of a coastline. The left side of the image is a dark teal color, serving as a background for the text. The right side shows a sandy beach with white, foamy waves crashing onto it. The water transitions from a deep blue to a lighter turquoise near the shore.

I am a grain of sand
So small that I can
Feel an ant's footfall
Upon this fantasy
Called "the shore"
Where the waves
Don't reach us anymore.

I am surrounded, yet I
Am alone, bombarded
By what the galaxy has
Thrown upon my shoulders,
And tossed me round and
Round until all sense of space
And time and direction and
Purpose, of rhythm and rhyme
And reason is lost.

Teach us to live, O great ocean
Without notions of permanence
To be coaxed out of patterns
And left drifting in the
Essence of uncertainty.

How a Wandering Cat Survived During the Coronavirus Outbreak

By Sophie Cao, March 2020. China.

At the end of last month, on the way I walk home from work, I heard some slight voices on the car park near my apartment. Then a cat appeared behind cars! The cat was so thin and it could hardly stand and walk- as if it stayed hungry for a long time. I live in a suburban district and it's difficult for animals to seek food. I have seldom seen wandering cats before.

I stayed with the cat, while gz went upstairs to bring some cat food and a cat bag. There is a cat at home. I was not sure If we would keep this cat or find someone to keep it in the future. But we had no choice - We worried without care it will die soon.

We decided to put it in the pet shop at first, because there were other family members staying with us, which can be troublesome. The cat was so hungry and ate fast. A driver passing by also took out some water to feed it. When it finished eating, we opened the cat bag and hoped to catch it - to our surprise, it walked into the bag by itself!

We named it as 'Huohuo', which means 'fire' in Chinese. Its fur color is brown and eye color is golden. This is like firewood.

During the coronavirus outbreak, almost all people stay at home. The whole block is empty. I don't know how it has survived. The name also showed its life was like a fire.

I was very happy that day. It was as if I have some real connection to the world, instead of passing by in a rush every day. I felt I made a contribution, although I don't know if I saved the cat or the cat saved my low mood of this period.

Now 20 days passed, and Huohuo hoped to make a contribution to other cats by telling stories about how it went through these days. So Huohuo wrote a letter:

Dear world, dear cats:

No matter if you live in the southern or northern hemisphere; no matter if you are an prestigious cat or a street cat; no matter if now you are living in a comfortable house, quarantined in a pet shop or a hospital, or just wandering in different corners around the world---I hope you healthy and safe.

I heard that narrative practitioners always worked with communities who are marginalized. I think it's meaningful to articulate our voices. Our cats leave each other for a long time. While isolation can be a preferred lifestyle, this is a time for connection. I'd love to share about some local knowledges, skill, values and alternative stories sustained me during this difficult time:

1. How to survive in the wild?

Find somewhere to hide: Hiding in the car park can avoid the rain and wind, helping us to stay warm in the winter. Meanwhile, there is connection to human activity and more chances to be found. Obviously, the car park is a relatively smart strategy if not perfect - there is still some risks.

Seek for help: Although basically we cats are proud animals and can often live alone, but everyone is not the same. What's more, even superheroes have bad days. It's okay to acknowledge our weakness and vulnerability. During this difficult time, seek for help and say 'No' to the principles of individualized society such as self-discipline, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling.

Trust: Maybe this is a dangerous world and we little animals can be easily hurt by others. That's why we become very strong and cool. There are different survival strategies, though. I try to believe there are more nice people than the bad ones. There are some of them that are trustworthy.

2. How to survive in a pet shop?

Live seriously: Eating, drinking, sleeping... I kept daily routines. I respect and cherish the food, eating as much as I can. I have a good rest. The pet keeper said I had Malnutrition, so I tried very hard to heal myself. I received inspection and vaccine. This is a

new experience for a wild cat! But anyway, I tolerate it for my health.

Tolerate loneliness and boredom: Indeed, quarantined in a cage can be lonely and boring. It's great I already have some experience dealing with loneliness when I was wandering. I spent a long time sleeping to recover my strength. I also did some light sports and meditation and when I wake up, I remembered my early days with my mom and began to step on the ground. It's like an action that linked me to the past and my loved ones.

Hold hopes and keep waiting: I still hope some good things will come - snacks, visits, larger space for a stronger me, something unexpected... Who knows? Hopes make days brighter and shorter.

3. How to survive in a new home, meeting someone huge?

Deal with the frustration: I supposed my good day had come, but the most difficult part has just begun! This seems to be a complex world with complex relationships. There is a huge cat. I said 'hello' to him, but he shouted at me. I was blocked in the balcony. Anyway, it's a place with enough food, and much bigger than a cage.

Find something to play: I helped myself be familiar with the new environment. I can see the huge cat, who is called 'Momo', gazed at me through a glass gate. This makes me uncomfortable and anxious. Aren't your eyes tired? I found something to do. I jumped up and jumped down, sniffed everywhere, and played with leaves and other little items. This helped to alleviate the anxiety.

Be curious and show courage: The person hesitated to put me on the balcony, not sure if it is fair, but worried if putting us together will bring more dangers. I also observed the world on the other side of the gate, hoping to understand the situation. Momo is huge but slow. Then one day, the person opened the door and Momo came in, shouting at me several times. We are both scared of each other. But I stayed as calm as I can - When I was living in the pet shop, there were several dogs also shouting

at me! The shouting won't kill me. When Momo was close to me, I hit Momo with my claw. Momo escaped away - a paper tiger.

Stay with your friends: Finally one day, the frontier was opened before the person went out. We can go both in the two worlds and deal with each other. When the people came back, they were shocked. I still stayed at my home - a paper cat home, instead of going to a large world. Until this time, I went out of the balcony. Unless there are allies, I preferred to stay at a safe place. Allies can bring me more courage and confidence to explore a new world and face 'Momo'. If I like somebody or something, I will display my appreciations - I touched them with my head.

Reflection: How to face new challenges when a stranger comes to your land? - Momo's perspective

Be cautious: The first day someone I don't know came to my house, I had to be cautious to figure out the situation. I spent some time to research this dangerous stranger. But I'm a lazy cat, honestly. Observing for a long time can be exhausting. Sometimes I forgot him and just did my own things.

Show my attitude: The second day is the day I felt so down! When I woke up, I was shocked the stranger was still there - As if it is a host instead of a guest. I did nothing but show a black face. If I am angry, I express it genuinely. Why should I tolerate this? The anger visited me most when human beings played with the stranger frequently. This brought troubles for the person - She didn't know how to do what was fair to both of us. She was confused because she didn't want to impose social-constructed emotions such as jealousy on us cats. Actually, I didn't know how to name my emotion. But anyway, I claimed my emotional rights and got more company.

Overcoming the fear and opening my heart: Even though people said I am large, I'm timid sometimes. I don't know how to fight with others, so I can only shout to protect myself. The human beings searched for information online to find out: 'How long will a old cat accept a new cat?' What a stupid question. The answers online is normally 1-2 weeks. Is there a truth fitting every cat? I

don't think so. Cats' experiences are unique. The person opened the door after just 3-4 days. Maybe they trusted my friendliness. Wherever the stranger goes, I follow it. It seems it's not so horrible. And one day, I saw it crying. Is it frightened? A huge cat is really something! I've already shared the cat home (although it's useless to me because it's too small for me to get in), the balcony, the love, should I share more thing? I'm not sure.

Acknowledgment: What 'the person' wants to say

Occasionally, my friend Wenjia also picks up a wandering cat. During the coronavirus outbreak, there are some pets not fed in time, lost or abandoned.

Wenjia said she wanted to interview the cat: "Even though it's full of fleas and it's nothing but skin and bones, how has it survived when it was wandering? Moreover, how has it chosen a new caretaker on the roadside?"

She also wished to hear some stories from Huohuo and Momo. Inspired by her, I wrote this story. Yes, we need to interview them, and maybe we could also learn something from them.



To 'Huohuo' the fire in a severe winter:

What you are facing is definitely difficult for you.

To seek for a warmer world, you never give up.



上个月末，我下班时路过家附近的停车场，听到一些细微的叫声——一只小猫从车后钻了出来！这只猫骨瘦如柴，几乎难以站立和行走。它好像饿了很久。我住在一个动物难以觅食的郊区，我很少在这里见到流浪猫。

我看着这只猫，gz上去拿猫粮和猫笼。家里已有一只猫，我们不确定要不要养它，还是为它另寻主人。不过我们没有其它选择，它快要死了。我们决定先把它放在宠物店寄养，因为那时有家人在，怕会有些麻烦。这只猫饥肠辘辘，狼吞虎咽。等它吃完我准备抓它时，它竟然自己走进了猫笼里！

我给它取名叫‘火火’。它的毛发是柴火的棕色，眼睛是金色。疫情期间，几乎所有人都呆在家里，整个街区空空荡荡。这个名字也象征着它如火焰般燃烧的生命力。

这一天我很开心，好像与周围的世界有了真实的链接，而非行色匆匆。我感觉自己出了份力，尽管我不知道是我救了猫，还是猫救了我疫情期间的低落心情。

现在20天过去了，火火经历了这段困难时期，也想为生活在世界上其他角落的猫咪做贡献，于是它写了一封信给世界各地的猫咪：

亲爱的世界，亲爱的猫咪：

不管你生活在北边，还是南边；不管你是品种猫，还是田园猫；不管你此刻躺在温暖的家里，还是四处流浪，又或者是被隔离在医院或宠物店，我祝福你平安健康。我听说，叙事实践者总是和那些被边缘的声音在一起工作。我认为发出我们的声音很重要。虽然我们

猫咪彼此疏离的历史很久很久，但这是一个彼此联系的时刻。我刚刚经历了一段困难时期，想与你们分享一些支撑着我度过难关的一些独特的知识，技巧和信念和故事。

1. 在野外如何生存？

找到地方躲藏：躲在停车场可以遮风避雨，帮助我保暖。同时，可以和一些人类的活动发生联系，增加被发现的概率。显然，这是个聪明的策略——尽管不够完美，因为还是有点危险的。

寻求帮助：尽管我们猫咪是骄傲的独居动物，但每一只猫都不一样。再说了，超级英雄也有穷途陌路时。承认我们的脆弱，去寻求帮助吧。在这个艰难的时刻，对个体化社会自力更生，自给自足和自我实现的美梦说‘不’。

信任：这也许是一个危险的世界，我们这些小动物很容易受伤。因此，我们中的一些猫变得高冷。可是，世界上有不同的生存策略。我尝试去相信世上还是好人多。

2. 在宠物店如何生存？

认真地活着：我保持吃喝拉撒的日常生活。我尊重而珍惜食物，尽可能多吃。我拥抱好的睡眠。宠物店的小姐姐说我营养不良，因此我努力疗愈自己。我接受检查和疫苗这些作为一只野猫从未经历过的新鲜事物。

承受无聊和孤独：隔离在一个小笼子里有些煎熬，而幸运的是我流浪时已拥有一些与孤独共处的经验。我不断用睡眠恢复我的力气。当我醒来，我也做一些轻度运动和冥想。我回忆起童年和妈妈在一

起的时光，开始在地板上踩奶。这个动作让我链接我的过去、链接我爱的人。

心怀希望，继续等待：我仍期待有些好事会不时发生—零食，拜访，更大的空间和更强的我，一些小小的惊喜...谁说就一定不会有呢？保持希望让日子变得明亮而短暂。

1. 如何在新家生存，与一只大猫共处？

应对沮丧：我以为我的好日子要来了，没想到最困难的挑战才刚刚开始。这个错综复杂的世界有错综复杂的关系。有一只大猫，我对它打招呼，它却对着我‘哈气’。我被关在了阳台上。不管怎么说，这里比笼子大多了，也有足够的食物。

找些东西玩：我帮助自己熟悉新环境。我看见这只叫做“墨墨”的大猫，通过玻璃门虎视眈眈地盯着我。这令我焦躁不安，你的眼睛不累吗？我找到一些事情帮助我缓解焦虑—玩叶子，玩瓜子，跳上跳下，嗅来嗅去。

保持好奇，展示勇气：那个人既犹疑把我关在阳台是否对我不公平，又担心把我俩放一起会带来更大风险。我从玻璃门的另一端观察世界，希望理解自己的处境。墨墨很大，可总是慢悠悠的。一天那个人把门打开，墨墨进来了，对我“哈”了好几次。我们都很害怕彼此，但我尽可能保持冷静—我在宠物店的时候，有几只狗也对我叫了！狂吠不会令我死去。墨墨靠近我的时候，我抬起我的爪子打了它。墨墨落荒而逃---真是一只纸老虎！

和盟友在一起：终于有一天，人们出门前把玻璃门打开了。我们可以在两个世界来去自如，互相磨合。当他们回来时，非常诧异——我哪里也没有去，竟然还是躺在我的纸猫窝里一动不动。看到他们

回来，我才气定神闲地从阳台里走出来，去客厅溜一圈。除非有盟友，我还是宁可待在我的小窝里。盟友带给我探索世界和面对墨墨的勇气和自信。如果我喜欢什么人或者什么东西，我就用头蹭这些东西来表达我的喜欢与感谢。

反思：当一个不速之客来到你的疆域时，如何面对新挑战？ ---墨墨的视角

小心翼翼：第一天看到一个陌生动物来到我家时，我只有加倍谨慎地搞清楚状况。我花了很多功夫研究这个不速之客。但是老实说，我是只懒猫。长时间的观察令我精疲力竭。有时候我把这件事抛诸脑后，去做我自己的事情。

表达我的态度：第二天是最糟心的一天！我醒来后发现这只不速之客竟然还在那儿，并且有反客为主的风险。我感到十分低落，一整天除了摆出一副扑克脸外什么事情也没做。如果我感到生气，我就真诚地表达它。我为什么要忍着呢？当那个人去看望陌生动物，与它玩耍时，愤怒频繁造访我。这给那个人带来了麻烦——她不知道怎么做才对我们俩都公平。同时，她也很困惑，因为她不想把诸如嫉妒之类社会建构的情绪强加在我身上。说实话，我也说不清我的情绪是什么，反正不开心就是了。反正，我争取了我的情绪权力，也得到了更多陪伴。

克服恐惧，打开心扉：人人都说我体型很大，可是我有时真的很胆小。我不知道怎么和别人打架，我只能通过“哈气”保护我自己。人类在网上查找信息：“老猫接受新猫要多久？”真是愚蠢的问题，哪有放之四海的真理。网上的答案是一到两周，但每只猫的经验都是独特的。才3到4天，人类就把门打开了，或许他们相信我的友善。不速之客走到哪里，我就跟到哪里。它看起来好像也不是那么

可怕。有一天，我看到它哭了。它是被吓到了吗？大猫可是很威武的。我已经分享了 my 猫屋（虽然这对我没用，因为我钻不进去），我的阳台，我的爱，我还应该分享更多的东西吗？我不确定。

感谢：‘那个人’想说些什么

几天前，朋友文佳也捡了一只流浪猫。疫情期间，很多宠物不能得到及时的喂养、走失或被抛弃。文佳说，她想采访那只猫猫：“虽然搞的自己一身跳蚤，又瘦成皮包骨头，但流浪这些天是如何保存自己的生命的，又是如何在路边挑选新铲屎官的？”文佳说，她也想听听墨墨和火火的故事。受她的启发和鼓舞，我写下这个故事。我想是的，我们需要采访它们，或许可以在它们身上学到一些事情。

。

致敬寒日里的火火——

现在面对的困难，对你来说一定不容易。为寻觅一个更温暖的世界，你从未放弃努力。



Cat by Lyn, April 2020. Canada.

Huohuo and Momo

By Neko, April 2020. Canada.



A Pandemic Correspondence with a Challenging Presence

By Agnieszka Wolska, April 2020. Canada.

*Why do you insist that we stop celebrating
each other and ourselves, Comparison?
That's what I really want to know.*

Hey Comparison,

Can we have a coffee date this morning?

I really want to chat, because I don't understand some things you've been doing, and these things are hurting.

I have noticed that when you come around my heart and you are kind of whispering things to me, I don't do very well afterward. I'm not really liking it right now, especially in this pandemic situation, everything is kind of compounded and feels intense, you know?

Can we hang out? I'm making coffee right now.

I'll FaceTime you at 7:30, k?

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Hey,

Okay. I'll be there. But can we just message instead of FaceTime?

C.

~ ~ ~

Sure, that's totally fine.

See you in a few.

Do you have coffee or something?

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Hey,

I'm fine, thanks. And I meant to tell you, when you were doing Tiffany's course? Remember their post about making a really good tea? That was so awesome. Tea is great!

C.

~ ~ ~

Uhm, k.

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Okay, okay. See you.

C.

~ ~ ~

Hi Comparison! I'm here!

Okay. So, I am actually super nervous about this...

We've known each other a long time. My mom introduced us, remember? Do you remember that boy in my grade 6 class? My mom knew his mom and he was like really, really good at math... mom told me about how good he was, over and over...

She really wanted me to be good in Math, just like him. And I wasn't. It was kind of strange feeling. I was usually pretty happy for the kids who did amazing things, you know? But when you came along, now I was kind of uncomfortable... a bit confused. What was I supposed to do? I wasn't good at math like him, I was good at other things, like writing and music and art. Why were we talking about his skills and not mine? That really confused me. Was there something wrong with me because I wasn't like

that boy when it came to math? I really didn't get it yet, you know?

Anyway, what I don't like is that I really liked both me and him but then, when you came in the picture, that really changed. I know my mom loved me, but I have to admit I like us all a bit less after that kept happening. It's like I was supposed to like me less. After she kept telling me how good he was in this insistent way. We weren't celebrating me or him anymore... you know?

Why do you insist that we stop celebrating each other and ourselves, Comparison? That's what I really want to know.

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

We are going way back, hey? (eye roll emoji).

Fine.

Let me explain. But hear me out. I am NOT defending myself. I was INVITED. I did not force myself in. I was seen as USEFUL.

Mom saw your potential. You were super smart. You totally could have aced math. She saw that. Your teacher told her that.

So, she brought me in to help you get going.

I mean, look, you were constantly singing and playing guitar all the time. Like, all the time! And you were always scribbling your stories. And that's all well and good and great, but POTENTIAL! Potential is important, you have to agree. Potential to be really good in math was definitely there, and Mom knew it. She wasn't much good at math and she was busy with your younger sibs, so I came to help. Because you needed MOTIVATION! So, yeah. I was the motivation.

So, please don't yell at me. Like I said, I am invited to help. You invited me, too, by the way...

C.

~ ~ ~

Okay, I need a moment. I am feeling a lot of things but I will really try not to yell.

So. Wait... no... *I* did not invite you when I was in grade six. I liked that boy, I said that, remember? I had no problems with him being great at math. I had no problems with me being less great. I was *happily* singing and playing and writing. Why is that a problem for you???

And you didn't answer my question, why did we have to stop celebrating each other and ourselves? Why do potential and motivation **cancel** celebration??

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Grrr.... This is making my head hurt... Go ahead and celebrate! How am I getting in your way??

C.

~ ~ ~

Okay, but you know it's really hard to actually celebrate because you are constantly whispering at me, super intensely! Is all that about motivation and potential?

All that whispering about how other folks under quarantine are learning Spanish, cooking elaborate meals, doing amazing yoga practices every morning, teaching their kids about all the world's religious traditions through music, and enacting *Le Miserables* in the living room...

Okay, so I really want you to know that I can't do all that. And I'm not sure that I want to. But when I say that to you or myself, then I feel like I totally SUCK.

So there, it is really hard to celebrate me or all these cool folks doing awesome stuff when I feel like I suck. I can't even do the things I love doing.

And it makes me so friggin' sad.

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Uh, I need a minute.

C.

~ ~ ~

Okay, did I hurt your feelings?

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

No, I just... I didn't think of it that way...

C.

~ ~ ~

Oh. I'm here whenever you're ready, k?

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

K, thanks. C U in a bit. If you still want to?

C.

~ ~ ~

I do. I think we can work this out. Or at least we can try. We've known each other a long time. I think you know me well. I think it's worth it. We have time. Well, I definitely have time.

Agnieszka

~ ~ ~

Yeah, I have time.

Bye for now.

C.



Entropy Exits (Detail) - Bryan J. McLean (2020)
Digital Painting 16x12 inches

[Lights in a Dark Landscape]

By Bryan J. McLean, March 2020. Canada.

I am having a hard time believing in my future. I cannot see an easy way forward, and all my work feels petty and meaningless and privileged. I've been non-employed since February, so being focused on university and watching my daughter has its own rewards.

Yet, I am uneasy. I'm trying to plan for the next few months & years of finishing degrees, the end goal is helping others - but that feels nearly a decade away.

Meanwhile I'm doing digital fine art and writing - related work on zen buddhism and non-representational images. I'm trying to generate creative work so I can help other adult learners experience and apply new problem-solving skills.

However, all these cracks in the world just say I'm wasting my time and I am fitful from all this futility.

And yet if the world ends as we know it, the only skills I'll have are sarcasm and asking people how they *feel* about this new endless despair.

I had/have so many plans. I'm struggling daily to be motivated to accomplish anything more than basic tasks. Also feeling like I'm back to adrenal issues, where no matter how much I sleep I get, I rarely feel rested.

My anxiety and depression are mostly in check because we have legitimate problems facing us. That's not to say the depression is not affecting me, just that I can rationally be worried and focus on important things/steps that need doing.

Whereas my heart racing & anxiety of the past is a non-rational part of me that gets set off due to fatigue or compounded stress. Being in a panic while driving or eating a sandwich for zero reason is complex and frustrating.

It's so difficult to be creative in this situation. It's never felt so extreme before, that pressure from the world outside. Yet all these other creators are hosting and doing live things and making stuff and I'm handcuffed by my limited hours.. oh and everyone giving things away for *free*. How can I make money I need when the creative-making-world is just giving everything away for free?

How dare I put my hand out when one side offers 'no charge', and the other side is so much worse off.

I'm overwhelmed by the number of art teachers/courses out there - how can I even make money doing something I care so deeply about and want to share with others, when I know that certain people that need it most, actually have no funding? My head feels like hitting the wall repeatedly from all this frustration.

I really don't know whom to talk with. I don't want advice or suggestions; those make me want to choke-slam people trying

to cheer me up. I don't need cheering up. I FUCKING DON'T NEED CHEERING UP. Again, for those in the back, I don't need to cheer up.

What I need is to sit with my grief in a space that allows it to pass. Yet this storm around us, it isn't passing. It doesn't even look like it's at its peak, nor is there any sign of it ending. It isn't something you ignore, and it isn't something you can joke about forever.

Legitimate fear for the wellbeing of those close to us is all consuming some days. Dealing with a potential 'new normal' that changes daily is madness, and it dismantles even my small joys.

I struggle to see the point in discussing this with my/any counsellor. I truly cannot think of anything they would say that I don't already know I should be doing - if I wasn't already doing it in the first place. Important things first, be grateful, etc. I know what needs doing.

It's the waiting that is like holding your breath underwater - will we ever surface?

I am not as bad off as so many others, so it feels I have no right to complain. I know it's not a competition.

I feel constantly interrupted though.

For a practicing Buddhist, ironically, I've been angry for months... and months... and it's been growing and growing. I'm not out of control, I just don't have anywhere to put these hot-feelings down. I roll them into other purposes to keep busy, it's an itch that won't leave, but I really have no way to deal with them. No way to ground them or normalize them.

My toolkit for dealing with this all would likely break other people; but this is not a competition. I'm a level fifty self-care fighter-mage. I know how to let things go, I know when or where to focus important intentions. I know how to mask my own problems. Yet fatigue sets in. I am tired of my head aching.

I just want to sit zazen quietly, but what once had meaning for me no longer seems to matter. I want to go and run like 5k just to do anything that feels like movement instead of this stillness, but that feels like a luxury I am not permitted.

We are expected to sit still, sit tight. How are we supposed to help the world heal, if we cannot even participate with it?

How can we dismantle the wealthy monsters of the world and help each other grow stronger when all hope is so trepidatious and out of reach?

How can we find lights in such a dark landscape?

So night after night, I am just lying here. my anger glowing hotter.

Toolkits For Trying Times



A Narrative Practices Approach to Managing Mental Health in Times of Uncertainty

By Anupa Mehta, March 2020. Mumbai, India.

Co-Researchers: S, R, J

Graphic support: Sachi Shah

The idea of a personal toolkit, both metaphorical and literal, emerged out of recent conversations with individuals in Mumbai, and elsewhere in India, all of whom are in some form of enforced quarantine for the Novel Corona virus.

(As of April 6, India is under one of the harshest lock downs in the world.)

MY MILIEU

The milieu I work in is urban, multi-lingual and multi-cultural, and includes individuals from middle class and upper middle-class (in an Indian context) strata. Most of my co-researchers are educated and aware of privilege, even as they deal with growing difficulties around mental well-being in the current climate. We also recognize that for many Indians-as maybe the case in other countries around the world-the state enforced 'lock down' implies little or no access to basic facilities: those of food, shelter, electricity and clean water.

NARRATIVE CONVERSATIONS

In recent therapeutic conversations my co-researchers and I looked at how it might feel to replace harsh words such as "lock-down" and "quarantine," with more comforting words such as "retreat," "seclusion" and "unexpected vacation." (*Add your own to the list!*)

We explored whether it may be useful to draw from existing toolkits, from the trades, such as those used by gardeners, carpenters, electricians, hair-dressers and manicurists, among others, as a reference to create unique tool kits to dip into during tricky times.

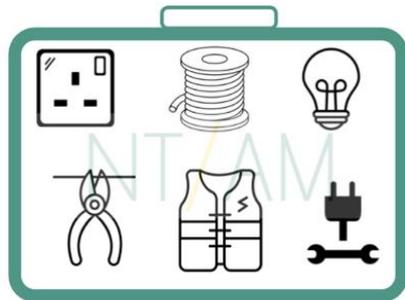


A carpenter's box with tools to join, fix, and make...



A gardener's box with tools to dig up, plant, and grow...

Note: Toolkits are used by virtually everyone: they are versatile and can help fix, repair, mend, plant, build, join, shape, rewire, nail down, protect...



An electrician's box with tools to wire, plug in, and light up...

SAMPLE KITS

MY LEARNING COMES FROM:

- A. Having witnessed a loved one's life skills for managing her life as a 'lock in' from 1989-2018. She had many ways of managing self-imposed isolation, including a tightly curated daily routine. Her day was measured by meals and self-care; her nights were spent being watchful of all those who slept. She had special knowledge/s to manage morning 'mood' and seasonal and cyclical arrivals and departures of 'highs and lows' *

**A separate document of her skills can be made available on request*

- B. My understanding of "Re-telling the stories of our lives," (Denborough, 2014, referenced below), and the important Narrative Practice idea that, "People always take actions for their lives" (White and Epston, 1990).
- C. Stellar projects by persons with lived experience, peer knowledges by individuals and communities working in association with Dulwich Centre, Adelaide.

QUESTIONS IN THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATIONS

(occasionally scaffolded) could look like:

Q. I wonder whether it may be useful to create a unique tool kit for yourself, one that could possibly help manage 'beasts' and other beings which might rear their heads during this time?

...If so, what might your unique toolkit be comprised of....?

Q. How might it feel to make a drawing of this tool kit as a visual narrative of tools you might use, and the actions you may take, to navigate this unexpected twist in time so as to create a preferred identity for this leg of your life's journey?

...And, would it be useful to explore how you might use each item in your tool kit for?

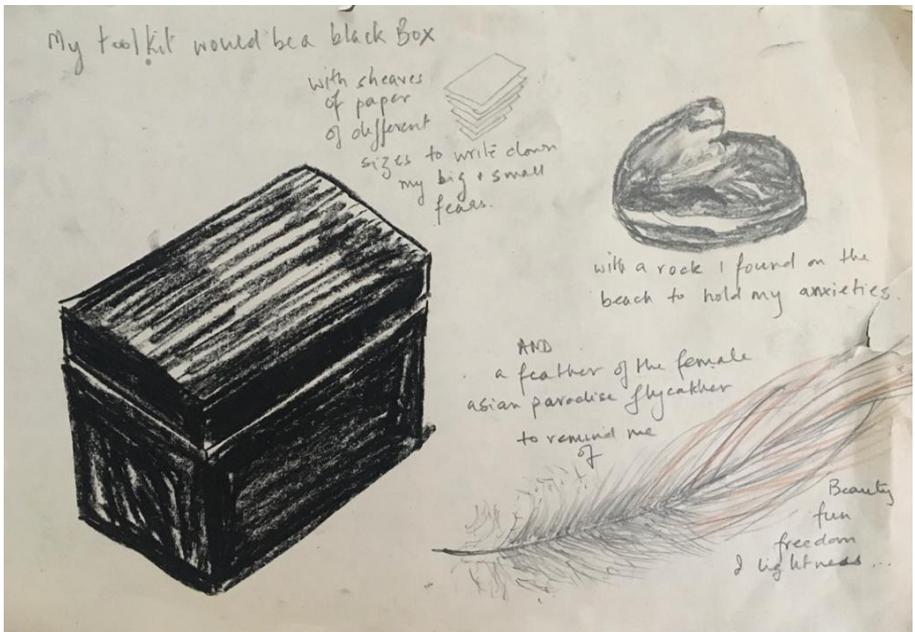
A colleague from India, Y, responded to some of these questions to say, "I love the questions and all the possibilities hidden in them for one to explore life skills and micro-actions that each one responds with in trying times."

TALENTED TOOL-KITS & POSSIBILITIES FOR UNIQUE OUTCOMES

S, 27, who was under government enforced home quarantine from March 21 to April 4, on returning to Mumbai from Africa, and remains homebound under the Indian government's lockdown said:

"I get anxious from time to time. To take care of myself, I need to feel like I'm contributing to the world around me, especially in this time of need. For my tool kit, I chose my computer, as it's the best tool I have in my room. It allows me to work virtually, metaphorically, and in actuality, during my home quarantine. I work in Public Health, and I think this is the time for young people everywhere to rewrite many things. I want to rewrite policy around health and the environment."

R, 48, an artist who is hemmed in on a private property in a village off the city of Mumbai since March 22, with no access to road or sea travel to return created this text-drawing. She says:



“My toolkit is a mental construct which I use to reign in my thoughts. It helps to be able to put anxious, overactive thoughts into a metaphorical black box that can hold them, and open up space for being more present to what is around me. The elements in the box are totems or objects to which I give up bits that aren’t working, and embody them outside myself. Through this metaphorical box and its imbued objects, I can let go, surrender and breathe a little when my mind gets confused, overwhelmed or just weighed down by old patterns that are cropping up during this crisis.”

Excerpts from a conversation with J, 28, a working professional, who has returned to her adoptive parents’ home in Bangalore, India, till the ‘lockdown’ ends.

A: I wonder if it may be useful to create a unique toolkit for yourself, to manage some of the beasts that might rear their heads during this time?

J:...I don’t know...but okay...If I had to look at it I would think of it as packing for a holiday/adventure/journey to a place we’ve never been before. Even if we’ve never experienced what the weather feels like there, the principles of packing remain the same - we prepare for what we might face with what we have. An umbrella/ raincoat for the rainy days, socks for cold nights, shorts for a bright sunny day. I think it’ll be a mix - some cold/rainy days and some warm ones. The quarantine makes me feel a little trapped. Not physically. It’s the time cage that bothers me - there’s a rush to reconnect with old friends, resolve old wounds, confront things I’ve been avoiding, have conversations I’ve been avoiding, accept change, heal, grow. It feels like we’re all running out of time on an all-important exam and there are no re-takes. Feeling metaphorically trapped like that makes me feel anxious. Sort of keyed up, unable to sleep well. Makes me suck in my stomach and not let enough air into my lungs. Curl up my toes and not let go. The nervousness and tightness in my heart builds up. I also just feel scared all the time of losing people. Grief feels like a large, looming shadow that will consume me, and I’m afraid I’ll be too weak to emerge. And at times, for reasons I haven’t understood, I want

to cry. I guess those are the beasts I think I will be reckoning with on this journey. But believing I can pack for this journey/ build a toolkit to draw from, makes it less intimidating. Makes me feel a little in control; like I can decide/ monitor on what side I come out. Makes me breathe a little easier. I feel less unsure of myself because I know what weapons I have to fight with.

A: Glad to hear that...and, would you like to share some ideas around what your toolkit might include?

J: Let's see....

Pen & paper for writing

Paints & brush for painting

A phone for music, or staying connected

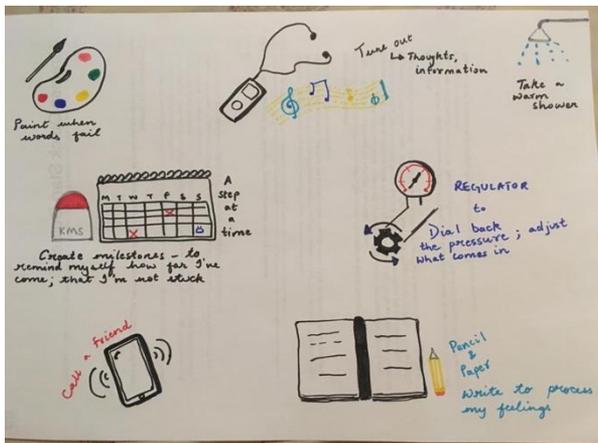
A warm shower

Regulator

Milestones

A: Would it be useful to make a drawing of this toolkit as a visual narrative of what you might use to navigate towards preferred outcomes? Would it be useful to explore what each of the items in your toolkit would enable you to do?

J: Sure...



J's drawing of items in her toolkit and their functions:

- A regulator to be able to dial back the pressure, or to regulate what I let in
- Listening to music or taking a warm shower helps tune out of the chatter in my head
- A phone to reduce the distance with people who aren't around.
- Milestones - for when I feel overwhelmed; to serve as a reminder to take things a step at a time and in smaller doses; so that each day doesn't blur into the next; to remind myself of how far we've come, that we're moving and not stuck, that there things to celebrate like weekends and birthdays.
- Paints and a paintbrush - to be able to express amorphous feelings when I can't find the words, or just for a bit of colour
- Paper and pen - to articulate and process my feelings

MY NARRATIVE PRACTITIONER'S KIT

My narrative practitioner's tool kit is translucent, a travel kit with transparent white wings. In it I keep a gifted compass, and a pair of magical golden nail scissors. I use the scissors sometimes to gently trim the edges of therapeutic conversations (with consent and discussion) which are not always helpful for my co-researcher, or me, given I, as therapist, too can feel vulnerable in these times.

Trimming edges offers possibilities: I think it allows people to view their internal and external landscapes in ways that are contained, to cope with unexpected and unprecedented times, such as now, in this current climate of a global pandemic.

Sparkling thought: Perhaps 'Tool kits for Trying times,' will become a global sharing of "ways to feel better in times of trouble."

HOPES AND DESIRES FOR THIS PROJECT

This project is at a nascent stage on April 6, 2020. I have a hope for it. I would like to see it travel across the world, possibly, as a source of hope for many people. Especially for those whose mental health difficulties may be put to additional test in these trying times. My desire is for professionals and individuals to use, modify, and share this document in ways that will be useful for the contexts in which they work. I am deeply grateful for the learning imparted by my teachers and trainers at Dulwich centre, Adelaide, David Denborough, and David Newman, Sydney Narrative Practice.

REQUEST: Please do tag me on social media if you share/use/develop the material from this project. Credits would be appreciated. I would also love to hear from you. My email is mehta.anupa@gmail.com and my website is www.anupamehta.com.

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Become the Borg of Your Favourite Things.

By Josiah Ditoro, April 2020. Canada.

I nearly died being born.

Apparently, I was so eager to be out in the world, I said to hell with completing my gestation and made my debut like the diva I am at the very beginning of my mom's twenty-fourth week. I was so small that my grandmother had to cut down Cabbage Patch Kids outfits so I had something to wear¹, because all of the available premie garments were miles too big.

Thanks to my dramatic entrance, I ended up with cerebral palsy. In my case, it affects the way I walk, plus my balance and my stamina². Because that wasn't quite challenging enough, I collected a few more issues along the way. First came arthritis in my late teens. And, let me tell you, you haven't lived until you've had a half dozen doctors tell you that you're too young for the issue they can clearly see is the problem.

After arthritis came fibromyalgia, though that one developed after keeping me guessing for a few years.

And then, just after fibro came calling, I had the misfortune of misdiagnosis --which claimed I had MS on top of my CP. That turned out to be false, but it took two years to find someone who would listen to me, rather than pat me on the head and tell me to come out of denial.

Then, most recently, what I thought were just the annoying after-effects of too many bouts of pneumonia turned out to be asthma. So, I added my lungs to the list of body parts that occasionally hate my guts.

I'm not telling you all of this because I want sympathy --or, worse, pity. I love my life, even with all of its messy complications. And, I don't claim to be some shining example of disability life. People online like to call themselves chronic

¹ I'm sure my less than a pound self made them look good.

² This is impossible to make look good, but I try.

illness warriors, but I'm no one's idea of a warrior. My hair is a perpetual mess, my coordination is still a work in progress, and my socks rarely match. But, I have been fighting to stay healthy and well my entire life.

Sometimes the fight is painful, other times it's uncomfortable and messy, or even downright embarrassing. How bad can it be, you ask? I had major orthopedic surgery at thirteen.

Bad enough to require major surgery that means you have to re-learn how to walk. Worse, so *very* much worse, when you end up on the care-by-parent ward, so your mom is your nurse, and you get your period. Thirteen-year-old me still shudders to think about it. The reality of chronic illness isn't like the Hallmark Channel movies want you to believe. I've been naked in more doctor's offices than a woman who's had a dozen kids. I've fallen and landed in more compromising positions than I like to think about, and have been rescued by both friends and strangers alike.

I never really thought much about my reality as a chronically ill person. It was just my life. No, I'm not inspiring. No, I'm not nearly as strong as many of you seem to think I am. I'm just me.

Then, everything changed because the entire world had to adapt to this crazy, terrifying pandemic.

Part of me wants to hide away --preferably in a small dark closet like I did when I was young and scared.

But, the rest of me? Are you kidding? The rest of me knows dealing with a pandemic just happens to be the health crisis I've been training for my entire life as a person with chronic illness³.

Let me explain.

Don't go out unless you have too? Check! I don't go out nearly as often as I'd like. Cerebral palsy means moving takes more effort. Fibro likes to send me waves of exhaustion for days. For extra fun, if I do go out, it often takes days to recover. And it all

³ Results not typical and applicable only to me.

happens completely without warning. The pandemic has meant people missed special occasions. I've been missing things for years.

Stay away from people? Definitely, check. When you have terrible balance, you need a space bubble. If you don't have it, the slightest bump could mean a fall.

Even when you know how to fall like I do, after having done it for thirty plus years, you can land in an ER pretty easily. I used to have to rely on my service dog for my space bubble. Now, I get it even if it's just me out and about, people give me a wide berth. If for some reason they don't, it's way more acceptable to be assertive and tell them to back off.

Make sure you go out with proper supplies? Yep. You guessed it. Check. Not very many people will leave their house without sanitizer and a mask and whatever else they need to stay healthy. That's definitely singing my song. I have to make sure I have medication, the proper mobility aids⁴, layers in case my temperature decides to go wonky, plus the usual wallet, shoes, purse, and phone. And, that's on a good day.

Let people help you if you need? This one, I still struggle with. But I've gotten better. I've had to. Remember those compromising positions I mentioned? Help, I've fallen and I can't get up may have made for a funny TV commercial; but in real life, when I'm stuck, I'd rather ask a stranger than wait on the ground. Other times, my body rebels in other ways. Once, on my way to university for an exam, my back spasmed so badly, I couldn't bend to reach my feet. My only option was to ask the cable repairman in the back alley if he could tie my shoes. Awkward? Yes. But better than getting snow in my shoes. And don't even get me started on the times I've wanted to help with chores but was too tired to even get out of bed. But, at the very least it means I have been able to let other, more healthy folks be the ones who go get the groceries. And, I could see value in letting others who were going out anyway drop things off for me

⁴ More complicated than you might think: cane, wheelchair, walker or service dog, depending on where and for how long.

without a struggle with my pride. Okay, fine, at least without *much* of a struggle with my pride.

That doesn't mean I can't find struggles elsewhere. The cerebral palsy guy in my brain still like to have parties with the Fibro chick and leave me so sick I can barely move. My doctor, my specialists, and even my pharmacist have gone out of their way to make sure I understand I am more at risk of getting more severe illness, and that I need to be extra careful.

Extra Careful likes to travel in packs with Extra Terrified and Extra Stressed. And, did I mention that a number of my symptoms are *worsened* by stress? I'm like a walking, talking, vicious circle. But it's a circle I'm used to, even if the reasons behind it are on a much broader scope. And it helps to tell myself this is all like an extended version of Business as Usual for me.

I don't like to plan because it stresses me out when the plan inevitably goes to hell in a convenient handbasket. But another part of business as usual with chronic pain? You learn how to distract yourself from the pain when your other treatments don't go far enough. And, I don't mean to brag, but I'm really good at it. Like, Master-Level good.

The secret? You have to indulge your Inner Nerd. The positive to this whole mess is that, while I'm trapped at home, I can really get into it. And I live with other people; so built-in captive audience, though I don't really need one to stay distracted. Some days it's my favourite book series. Some days it's fanfiction from my many and varied fandoms⁵. A good friend of mine is building a comprehensive timeline of all of the known events for his favourite show. I haven't quite gone that far but it's on my could-happen-next-week list. The trick of it is to pick something that will at least give a mental break. And I mentioned the captive audience because distraction works better if you can involve other people. Become the Borg of your

⁵ 'But there's a pandemic' is always an applicable reason to jump into another fandom. Just trust me on this.

favourite things and assimilate other people⁶. They stay healthy and they learn something. Or at least that's what I've been telling myself while I get my roommate into all my favourite shows.

It's a weird mental shift for me to see all of my disabilities as having given me something. I'm not one of those people who says it's made me stronger or more patient. If I'm any of those things it's because I've done the work, dammit. My various labels don't get to steal *my* thunder. But, at this point I'll happily take anything that make coping with a pandemic even a smidgen easier.

It helps that I've also already learned that it's okay not to be okay. *No, really.* It's not just a cliché. It's permission to be a complete mess as often as you need to be. Just because the skills I've learned are coming in handy doesn't make any of this any easier.

It doesn't wave a magic wand and reduce the bone-deep fears I have of my loved ones getting sick, or the clammy-skinned panic when I feel a bit of a wheeze when I breathe, because I might be getting sick. There have been a few people telling me I have to stay positive, have to keep finding upsides. But, I'm happy with just this one.

I like feeling like there might be an unexpected upside to having as many chronic illnesses as I have, to having dealt with all the things I've dealt with. It's about time there was one⁷.

I just wish it hadn't taken what feels like the end of the world to find it. But, you can't have everything.

⁶ No actual assimilations have occurred at my house. That would be wrong.

⁷ I mean other than the parking. That one is often in use, so it doesn't count.

Allow Yourself to Start Again



REI '20

When the crisis began, I thought that I would cope particularly well thanks to my experience with difficult circumstances, and especially with being housebound.

I was floored by how much I was struggling.

Systems I relied on were no longer usable. My cognitive resources stretched thin. And my self-esteem suffered, because I thought I should be doing better. With all I'd been through and all I'd learned, it should've been easier.

My coping skills weren't gone, but I had to start from the beginning in many ways. To refresh and relearn what I thought I already knew.

It's a new context. I can allow myself to start again.

Allow Yourself to Start Again

By Rei, 2020. Canada.

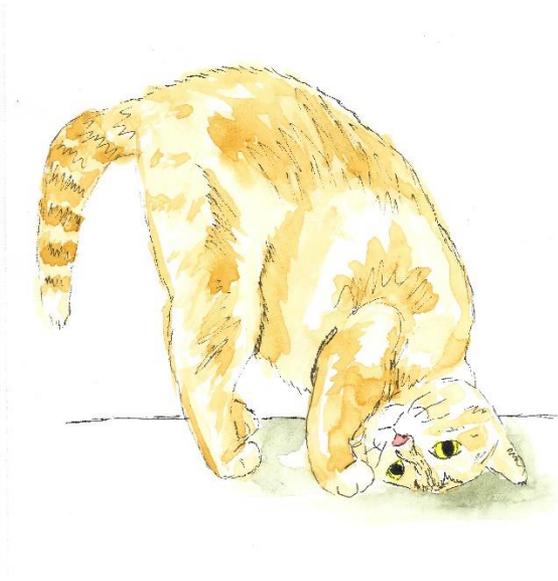
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Cheerio upside down by Rei, April 2020

Dear World, Dear Friends

By Sophie Cao, March 2020. China.

I'm Sophie from mainland China. As you know, China is the original and main suffering district of Coronavirus in the past 3 months.

Thank you for all your attention, care and love. Now from what we heard, the situation turned better - not all ended, but the most horrible time seemed past. I worry about the virus spreading around the world, and notice that some areas have become very serious.

Collective minded, we do feel sorry about the world. I hope you are all well and please take great care! I love Tiffany Sostar's idea about making a zine and collective document.

David Denborough's book described how to make the individual collective. Barbara Wingard once described telling stories in ways that make us stronger. I've shared some stories and encouragement for you.

Then I'm going to reflect on my experience of coronavirus and share some stories in a double-storied way. I reckon this as a tiny part of global solidarity in responding to the virus and hope it can be helpful in some ways. Although sometimes I used collective voices as 'we', since the big public events reflect the difference in districts, class, genders, and so on, these experiences would not cover multiple stories of the whole society.

Naming some effects of Coronavirus

Sorrow:

We feel sad when we witness our folks dying and so many families suffering. There were countless people unable to be cured in the overwhelmed medical system. So many tragedies happen every day and they are heartbreaking.

Fear:

Some of us feel panic for the lack of information transparency. However, different cases are not rare. The state media was full

of an optimistic tune and pervasive propaganda: don't believe rumours; don't spread rumours. The power produced knowledge and defined what is rumours and what's not. When we remind our parents who are living in a little city and not good at technology about the propaganda, they often replied: 'well, it's not so serious! You think too much!' Some of us believe that what is more horrible than the fear is the ignorance of the fear.

Worry:

Some worry about the health of ourselves and our loved ones. Some of us worry about the infection as well as possible consequences such as spreading to others, deaths, pain, discrimination and isolation. We worried more often when we had a cold and began to cough.

Anger:

We experienced so many ridiculous things happened from time to time, and our sadness and anger were overwhelming! We are angry in the Spring Festival's Eve when seeing huge celebrations on the state TV while helpless hospitals recruited medical materials and funds through social media. We are angry that the reports of Coronavirus are not fairly reported and some journalists are disappeared and threatened. The anger was fueled to a peak the night whistleblower Doctor Li Wenliang died on 6th Feb. Dr. Li warned of a Sars-like virus at the end of December. But he and other doctors were labelled as 'rumour-maker', disciplined by the police and criticised heavily by the official media. Under huge injustice, he went back to the hospital to save more lives, and finally test positive. He was interviewed and revealed his experience in his last days, and died from the once-called-rumour virus.

Depression:

Some of us feel depressed because our emotions are unable to be expressed. So many words are concluded in 'sensitive words'. We don't know how many we can say and where the mysterious power is. Any criticism and dissent can be convicted as 'bringing rhythm' and 'controlled by foreign power'. Some of us are silent for the fear of being seen and reported. Some of us experience self-censorship and very cautiously inspect every word we speak.

Some of us suffered the block of our social media account for our voices forever, losing all the contacts and even facing more unexpected troubles.

Isolation:

The coronavirus magnified the reality of the individualization of our society. During the time of staying home, the connection of real-world is cut off. The isolation of social distancing can cause a very huge impact to people marginalised, such as elderly people and people with disability.

Poverty:

The coronavirus can bring unemployment and poverty, which cause anxiety and despair. Some face huge economic losses and struggled in making a living. A bee keeper committed suicide because he cannot catch the flowering period for the city closure. A middle school student tried to eat poison because she failed to buy mobile phones for online courses.

Loneliness:

The authority controls the discourses and stresses out a 'major melody' and 'positive energy' and this can even influence our relationships with each other. As we are expected to be 'politically correct', our emotions are disciplined. We feel lonely because feelings like worry, sorrow and anger are less heard and resonated, regarded as 'negative', 'useless' and 'unreasonable'. This can cause quite a lot of self-doubt. Some of us cannot even open our hearts to our family and close friends, because sometimes our views are so different and unspeakable.

Powerless:

Most of us staying in a small space every day experienced boredom, loneliness and meaninglessness. As the cases climbed sharply, we also felt powerless because there was little we can do to help. We tried to donate money and materials but it's very hard to deliver to the hospitals and people in need. Some feel frustrated since we are unable to have a say on the issues. We are too trivial to make a change.

Complexity:

Some of us experience complexities and confrontations of mixed feelings. The influence of Coronavirus is different from person to person depending on where you are, how you care about it as well as the information you get. Some of us feel frustrated seeing others careless. Some of us also feel some benefits of this period of time, such as avoiding social activities, feeling more relaxed when wearing a mask, staying at home without pressures to live a busy life, and so on. Some of us feel guilt and feel unethical about enjoying privileges while others are still suffering. Some of us don't know how to handle these complex feelings.

Anxiety:

Some of us spend most time online and immersed with numerous information. We review news, posts, social media information from different platforms. For a long time, I cannot escape from online activities to concentrate on anything else. Some of us face anxiety when all plans were broken. Some of the students are anxious about their studies and exams. Some of us feel uncertain about the future.

Discrimination & Shame:

The coronavirus can divide persons and objectify persons if we don't remind ourselves carefully to separate the problem from the person. When people from Hubei province step out of their homeland, they encounter discrimination in other provinces. When Chinese people go out of the country, they face discrimination overseas. Now it turned to racism and all Asian people suffered from this. In the early period, some went out because they don't know about the virus at all. Some overseas Chinese bought many wearing masks because the situation in Hubei province is so horrible and we all hope to help. As the infection cases increased, our hearts turned heavy. Although we tell ourselves we should separate virus from people and separate people from the government, some of us do feel that it's our fault to cause troubles to the world. This will hurt our cultural and self-identity.

Domestic conflicts & Abuses

While some people enjoy staying with family members, some people face troubles. Longer time at home can magnify some domestic conflicts when problems have nowhere to go but accumulate in the same places. Some transgender people have to bear wrong pronouns from their family members. Some women and children are more vulnerable since it's harder to go out and seek for help in this very time.

Insomnia

Some of us sleep a lot to kill the time. Some of us cannot fall asleep at night.

Responding to Coronavirus

Protect ourselves and care about each other

I bought 4 masks after work on the day I knew about coronavirus. But then I cannot buy any proper masks soon. We remind each other to stay at home as much as possible. I noticed and cared about what happened, did necessary fact checking and shared some knowledge with others.

Do what we can do to help

We knew about the extreme lack of protective materials of hospitals in Wuhan, the central zones of coronavirus during Chinese New Years' Eve. We joined in some money-raising projects to support the difficulties in Wuhan. There were also some projects supporting marginalised communities such as sharing masks with sanitation workers and delivery riders. During the coronavirus outbreak, numerous posts appeared online seeking for help. I forward these posts like millions of netizens to make them more visible.

Share sorrows

Sometimes I share sorrows when I read a sad story. Some of them need to be known. Once sorrows can be shared by more people, they can be witnessed and accompanied, then it's less overwhelming for the individuals.

Mourning

We mourn the death of our ordinary people and our doctors who die from coronavirus. When Dr. Li died, we changed our profile to black. While discussions about Dr. Li were censored, we wrote poems to remember him. Some people shared photos about that they wore a mask with the sentence: 'I can't. I don't understand.' We claimed freedom of speech. Now every day, there are millions of people who comment on Dr. Li's last post to share their own life stories. Dr. Li left us but became a national therapist. Today there are 16.5 million forwards, 65.2 million messages left, and 274 million likes of his post. We cried for him a lot. We lament his death for what we cherished -to be a kind and honest person.

We agreed with what Dr. Li said: "A healthy society should be more than one voice."

Speak up

When we see articles talking about social injustice, we forward them. Some journalists went to the central areas to investigate the facts. We do what we ordinary people can to protect truth. Speaking up in some way can make a difference, even though the difference is so invisible. If others see you speak up, they will stand out, too. We do these actions to support each others' courage. Several days ago, a doctor's long story about how coronavirus was silenced in early period was killed all around Chinese internet. Within 24 hours, netizens spread the story through different ways, including counter-writing, picture transformation, ancient Chinese, different languages and dialect, Morse code, language of Mars, emoji writing, invisible words, Pinyin, showing subtle resistance to strong censorship. We all hope for a just society.

Leave mobile phones for a while

It's helpful to leave mobile phones for a while after using them for a long time. Sometimes we can be occupied by information and technologies. But if you do spend a lot of time on it, don't

blame yourself. There are so many things to be concerned about, sometimes I don't want to miss them. Just try to create some space for the real world.

Focus

I don't know how to do meditation though I hope to learn, so I call it focusing. One of my friends said you don't need to do formal meditation, focusing is a kind of meditation. So, I try to focus, when I'm cooking, I try to look at the steams. When I cut the foods, I try to concentrate on the process. When I am walking, I look around the world, feel the wind, and hear the noises. For a long time, I got used to listening to podcasts when I'm cooking, or checking messages while I'm on the road. Although doing one thing at a time seems boring. But this can give me a sense of devoting and free me of complexities. There might be some unexpected discoveries.

Clean the bathroom

I found doing some specific things can overcome a sense of powerless and anxiety. I learned this skill from one post from an online friend. She said: "Whenever I feel unhappy, I go to brush the toilet." I was very curious about this skill and wanted to try it myself. Then one afternoon, I brushed the toilet and cleaned the bathroom. I enjoyed the process of focusing on my mind and using my hands to make something different. When I saw all the items 'bling-bling' at the end, I felt a sense of personal agency.

Talk with others

Talking with others can make us feel better in the isolation period. We can talk to strangers about simple things like 'How many masks do you have?' 'Where did you get you masks?' 'Where do you spend your Chinese New Year?' these questions can create connection and understanding about others lives. One friend shared her experience and I was inspired. Then one day I talked with a stranger and answered his questions in a more specific way, instead of playing smartphones all the way. We can also talk with friends who we haven't contacted for a long time. It's difficult to live in an environment without understanding. It's good to find some mind-like people and join a community where we can find some resonance, while sometimes we can still keep

curious about different points. We can also make some new friends. I added some new friends online. Sometimes it's difficult to be the first one to connect with others because we are afraid to be refused or to cause disturbance to others. But we can give it a try. Maybe other people have similar worries and hope to be connected. In the meanwhile, if we joined many groups we can be lost in overloaded information. It's fine to stay alone.

Read

Sometimes I want to express my ideas and comment on something, I found the events are so complex and far beyond my knowledges. I do some readings to help me understand some situations.

Writing & Keeping diaries

There will be a time we read everything frantically, there will be a time we cannot read anything. Sometimes my mind is exhausted and disordered, particularly when I tried to think about something beyond my limits. Through writing, our voices can be heard - at least by ourselves. This is therapeutic. One of my favourite authors said: 'When we transfer the dilemma into a masterpiece, we can feel more peaceful.' When we write our thoughts and feelings out, we keep a distance from them - Externalising! Sometimes I thought the problem is that there is nothing worth writing - my life is so boring and every day is just repeated yesterday. In this case, we can write some daily experience that we ignored before. Details are precious. It's a good time for us to notice something unnoticed on busy days when we have to stay in a little space. We can write tiny things like what our family members are talking to each other or just what our pets are doing every day. Through these stories, we reconstruct our relationship with the world, through our experience instead of theories. It's helpful for me not to put judgment on what is deserving to write. Either free thoughts, answering some questions or keeping a diary can be helpful. I learned the skill to keep a diary from my primary school Chinese teacher. At that time, we have a song about this: "diary diary, record every day. One day without recording, it shall be forgotten." It's true! After so many years, every time I went back

to the diaries of my childhood, I cannot help smiling and feeling lucky that I wrote them down! Even though there are so many wrong words and illogical sentences. When I grew up, I just forgot this skill as well as every day I spent. I heard that many citizens of Wuhan are writing a diary to remember these special days. I guess keeping a diary is a skill accessible for most of us. I regarded writing a diary as something to rescue personal history, and personal history consists of collective history.

Do a little exercise:

While staying at home for a long time, we can feel tired. Some of my friends used an app to do exercise every day. When they shared their activities in social media, I wanted to follow. However, it takes a long time to take action. I did some low-key activities. For example, I go for a walk after dinner in the quiet area I live. And when I went back from work I took off the bus in advance, walking more for one-station distance. This is because my communities were not blocked and I went back to work early. Maybe people in Hubei can only do sports in inner space.



Cat by Lyn, April 2020. Canada.

A Pandemic Passover Haggadah

By Lori Helfenbaum, April 2020.
Canada

Introduction

By Tiffany

This Passover Haggadah was written for the first Zoom Seder of Lori's family.

It was written to include more elements of social justice, from a desire to no longer be complicit out of fear. Lori is sharing it here despite fear that it is not 'good enough' - there are still patriarchal elements in the story, it does not go far enough in the direction of justice and equity. But it steps in that direction, and it steps with courage and intention.

I am honoured to have this Haggadah included in the zine, not only because it is beautiful and carefully crafted, but also because I think that taking small steps towards justice is so necessary and so difficult. Sharing these small steps - sharing our efforts and inviting others to witness us in our imperfect - is so generous. Lori shared, "Writing this had made me feel like I did it once, I can do it again."

The changes that felt most important to Lori include the land acknowledgement and the inclusion of anti-colonial elements, which have often been excluded from this tradition; the revamped story, which is more understandable for children, who are often excluded from traditions and rituals; the inclusion of the full backstory, which allowed Lori to bring Miriam and the value of women into the story.

There are two other cherished elements in Lori's rewriting, which I particularly appreciate. One is the "narrativizing" of the Haggadah by the inclusion of a paragraph about people always resisting oppression. The second, so close to my own queer heart, is the inclusion of the orange on the Seder plate, to represent the LGBTQ2+ community, which is often excluded.



Lori's best friend and cousin is a lesbian, and this inclusion of the orange was not only a step towards justice and inclusivity generally, but also a very personal act of reaching out to family.

As a queer person, these actions of both inclusion or exclusion have deep and long-lasting impacts.

Lori also shared:

This Haggadah is very much a work in progress! There are still many things I would like to experiment with, such as: removing patriarchal perspectives and interests that have coloured the story of Passover (this includes depictions of a violent and vengeful diety that wipes out first-born and male children!), the idea of punishing an entire nation of people (the Egyptians) for the transgressions of its leader and those supporting his leadership - I feel this can add to fuel to the fire of bigotry, particularly amidst concerns of growing Islamaphobia.

This pandemic has had me reflecting one small steps I can take to decolonize our family's day-to-day life and cultural rituals.



Land Acknowledgement

An expression of gratitude for the people on whose land we currently, live, work, celebrate, and play. The Calgarians are here today on Treaty 7 land, ancestral home to: The Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai people), the Tsuu T'ina, the Stoney Nakoda First Nations (Chinki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nation), and the Metis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

1. Introduce the Seder Plate - (shank bone, egg, green vegetable, bitter herbs, charoset)

New additions:

Feather

As settlers and descendants of settlers here, we have a long history of exploiting Indigenous people, as well as the animals, soil, water, plants and air they have taken such good care of for thousands of years. Given tonight's theme of slavery and freedom, this is also an opportunity for us to reflect on the racism, violence, and neglect Indigenous people continue to face today. This seems particularly important tonight, as we celebrate Pesach in the comfort of our homes, enjoying the privilege of the technology we're using.

This feather represents the necessity and our desire to repair our relationship with Indigenous people and this land. It reminds us about the Jewish teaching of "teshuvah," which recognizes that everybody hurts others, but that we can stop or minimize the harms we've caused by richly acknowledging and apologizing for our transgressions, and most importantly, by "ethically transforming" our behaviour to do better in relationships with those we have harmed. We have a long way to go toward true Reconciliation.

Orange

Represents the inclusion of our LGBTQ2S+ community in all aspects of Jewish life, as well as the larger communities we're a part of. This also represents our desire to better include people with disabilities, racialized people, people from cultures different from our own, women, children, non-binary people,

our elders, and others whose experiences and perspectives are so often excluded from the stories we tell. Spitting out the seeds is symbolic of rejecting the prejudice that permeates our own culture as well as the larger contexts in which we exist.

2. Kadesh: proclaiming the holiness of the holiday

PARTICIPANTS SAY A PRAYER TOGETHER OVER CUP OF WINE

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Drink first cup of grape juice / wine.

3. Urchatz - washing (without customary blessing)

4. Karpas

After reciting the blessing over vegetables, everyone eats one dipped in salt water. The salty water represents the tears the Jewish people cried because of their years of suffering and backbreaking work during slavery.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

5. Yachatz

Breaking the Middle Matzah. Break a piece of matzah from the matzah plate in two, returning the smaller part to the matzah plate. The larger piece is put aside to be hidden as the afikoman. The splitting of the matzah symbolizes the parting of the Red Sea that allowed the Jewish people to cross over dry land to freedom.

6. Children sing the Four Questions

מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמָצָה, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּל
מָצָה!

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר!

שֶׁבֶכֶל הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מִטְבִּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פַּעַם אַחַת, הַלֵּילָה
הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פַּעַמִּים!

שֶׁבֶכֶל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵינֵינוּ וּבֵין מְסֻבֵּינֵינוּ, הַלֵּילָה
הַזֶּה כָּלֵנוּ מְסֻבִּין!

When drinking and eating, we lean to highlight the fact that we are free people. In ancient times, only free people had the luxury of reclining while eating.

7. Drink second cup of wine.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

8. Tell the story of Passover/Exodus from Egypt:

A long time ago, there was a Pharaoh who forced all Jewish people living in Egypt to be slaves. They had to work very hard, building cities and pyramids. As slaves, they were beaten and weren't given enough food, water, or time to rest.

Pharaoh made sure the Jews were harshly punished to keep them under his control. He became so worried that the Jewish people would become too numerous and rise up against him, that he ordered all Jewish newborn boys to be killed. Jewish families were devastated and torn apart.

Yochevet was a Jewish mother living in Egypt who gave birth to a baby boy during that time. Because she loved him and did not want her son to die, she bravely hid him from the Egyptians for three whole months. Eventually, it became too dangerous for her to hide him anymore, so she came up with a plan.

Yochevet wrapped the baby up in a blanket and put him in a woven basket made of reeds. She handed the baby to his older sister, Miriam, to float him down the river Nile. Miriam hoped with all her heart that her baby would be found and raised by a good, kind family who would take care of him and keep him safe.

As he floated in the river, he was discovered by the princess, Pharaoh's daughter. Guessing he was a Jewish baby in danger, the princess felt compassion for him, and so she lifted him out of the river and brought him home to raise him as her own son. She named him Moses, which means "pulled from the water," and she kept his Jewishness a secret to keep him safe from Pharaoh.

But baby Moses still needed a mother's milk to keep him alive. The princess went back down to the river where she found Miriam, Moses' older sister, and asked her to find a wet nurse for him (a woman who could breastfeed him). Miriam went and got their mother, Yochevet, to feed him.

In the safety of Pharaoh's palace, Moses grew up to be a kind man. It hurt him to see all of the Jewish people being treated so badly and suffering so much. One day, Moses witnessed an Egyptian slavemaster being very cruel to a Jew, and Moses killed the slavemaster out of rage. Afraid of being punished for his crime, Moses fled to the desert, where he started a new life as a shepherd.

One day while he was tending his flock of sheep at Mount Sinai, Moses saw a burning bush. It was God's way of telling Moses that He had chosen Moses to free the Jewish people from slavery. Moses was unsure that he could do this by himself, but God promised He would help him.

Moses went with his brother Aaron to the Pharaoh to convince him to free the Jewish people. "Let my people go!" Moses told the Pharaoh, but Pharaoh would not believe that God had sent him, or agree to this arrangement.

So God sent a sign to convince Pharaoh. He told Aaron to throw down his staff, which miraculously changed into a snake. Unconvinced that this was the work of God, Pharaoh called his magicians to lay down *their* rods, which *also* transformed into snakes! But then, Aaron's snake swallowed all of the magicians' snakes. Pharaoh still didn't believe Moses and Aaron, and he continued to refuse to free the Jews. In response, God decided to punish him, sending ten plagues to Egypt:

First, he had Aaron touch the River Nile with his staff to turn the **water into blood**. All the fish died and the Egyptians could no longer eat or drink from the river.

Second, God made Aaron stretch his hands over the water and made **frogs** come spilling out onto the land, pouring into people's homes and bedrooms. At this, Pharaoh became frightened and promised that he would free the Jewish people if God stopped the frogs, but as soon as the frogs disappeared, he broke his promise.

Third, God plagued Egypt with **insects**, which swarmed the land, every person, and every animal. Despite this display of might, Pharaoh's heart only became more hardened.

Fourth, God brought forth hordes of **wild animals** stampeding across the entire country, destroying everything in their path.

Fifth, God brought **pestilence** - a plague of illness - to spread over Egypt, wiping out many of its people and livestock.

Sixth, God made it so that Pharaoh, his servants, the Egyptians, and their animals all developed painful **boils** all over their bodies.

Seventh, God made **hail**, with terrifying thunder, rain down over Pharaoh and the Egyptians, destroying most of their crops.

Eighth, God sent **locusts**, that swallowed up any remaining crops and all the fruit from the trees. At this, Pharaoh told Moses he would let all Jewish men leave Egypt but not the women and children. Moses would not accept this offer and warned Pharaoh that if he did not let all the Jews go free, the worst plagues were yet to come.

Ninth, God covered the land of Egypt in complete **darkness**, but still Pharaoh would not back down.

As the tenth and worst plague, God sent an Angel of Death to **kill every first-born** person and animal in Egypt. The only ones who were spared this horrendous plague were the Jewish people.

How did the Angel of Death know which households belonged to Jewish families? God told Moses to instruct the Jewish people to smear lamb's blood over their doorways so that the Angel of Death would pass over their houses. That is why this holiday is called "Passover."



In addition to remembering our hardship and suffering, Passover is also an opportunity to remember that all people who are oppressed try to find ways to survive, protect themselves, or fight back in some way. Even Pharaoh knew this, or he would not have gone to such lengths to maintain his power over Jewish lives.

In the story of Passover, there are many examples of this resistance to injustice and violence. When Pharaoh ordered all Jewish newborn boys to be killed, his mother Yochevet found secret ways of protected Moses from being found and killed. Moses retaliated against an Egyptian slavemaster who was hurting a Jew. Even Pharaoh's daughter, who was not Jewish herself, found a way to protect a Jewish baby from being killed.

What other examples can you think of, from the past or present, of people taking steps to try to protect themselves and others or to fight back in the face of injustice?

When we recall the plagues against Egypt, we remove a drop of wine - a symbol of joy - from our cups for each plague, because our joy is lessened when we remember the suffering of the Egyptians. Together, let us recall the Ten Plagues:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. BLOOD | דָּם (DAM) |
| 2. FROGS | צְפַרְדֵּי (TZ'FAR-DEI-A) |
| 3. LICE | כְּנִים (KI-NIM) |
| 4. INSECTS | עֲרוֹב (A-ROV) |
| 5. CATTLE DISEASE | דָּבָר (DE-VER) |
| 6. BOILS | שָׁחִין (SH'CHIN) |
| 7. HAIL | בָּרָד (BA-RAD) |
| 8. LOCUSTS | אֲרֵבָה (AR-BEH) |
| 9. DARKNESS | חֹשֶׁךְ (CHO-SHEKH) |
| 10. SLAYING OF THE FIRSTBORN | מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת (MA-KAT B'CHO- |

If the Egyptians oppressed the Jews and made them suffer, why do we remove the drops of wine from our cups in memory of the Egyptians' suffering during the Ten Plagues?

After all Ten Plagues had been delivered, Moses said to Pharaoh, "Now will you let my people go?" Finally, Pharaoh told Moses that he could take the Jewish people out of Egypt to freedom.

Moses called his people together and told them to pack their bags - it was time to leave Egypt. "Hurry", he said, "before Pharaoh changes his mind again." The people packed so quickly that they did not have time to let their bread dough rise. Because of this, when they baked it, it came out flat - an unleavened bread known as "Matzoh"! We eat matzoh on Passover to remind of this.

The Jewish people left Egypt as quickly as they could, but just as the Jews feared, Pharaoh changed his mind. Pharaoh instructed his soldiers to chase after the Jewish people. When the Jews arrived at the Red Sea, another great miracle happened. God made Aaron touch the sea with his staff, and the water parted so that the Jewish people could pass through it to safety on the other side.

Just as the Egyptian soldiers poured into the sea to bring the Jews back to Egypt, the waters closed over top of them, drowning them all. The Jewish people were free at last. Miriam, Moses' sister, led them in songs of joy and thankfulness for their freedom.

Although historically this wasn't the case, many Jews around the world now celebrate the importance of Miriam's role in the story of the Jewish people. In addition to helping her mother protect Moses from being killed, she was also a respected midwife in her community, expertly supporting women through childbirth. Miriam is credited with having helped her people keep their hope for freedom and peace alive, even during the hardest times. In recognition of this, God made fresh drinking water flow for the Jewish people while they wandered through the desert, for as long as Miriam was alive. When Miriam died, the water dried up.



To remember the time when the Jewish people left Egypt and became free, we get together with our friends and families every year to celebrate. We have a Seder, where we tell the story of Passover and sing songs. We read the Haggadah and eat special foods. We celebrate that we are free to live the way we want and to and not be slaves anymore.

A Song: "Dayenu!"

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים – דיינו!
 אלו נתן לנו את השבת – דיינו!
 אלו נתן לנו את התורה – דיינו!

Why is the story of Passover important in modern times?

9. Drink third cup of wine.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.

10. Rachtzah - washing hands before the meal

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם,
 אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על נטילת ידים.

11. Motzi Matzah

Take hold of the three matzahs (with the broken one between the two whole ones), and recite the blessing over it:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא
 לחם מן הארץ.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו
 על אכילת מצה.

Pass some matzah around for everyone to take a piece.

12. Maror (Bitter Herbs)

Horseradish is very bitter and hard to eat - it reminds us of the bitterness of our slavery in Egypt.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר.

13. Korech

Sandwich the maror & charoset between 2 pieces of matzoh and eat it.

It is tradition to make a sandwich out of the matzah and maror (bitter herbs) and charoset. We eat the bitter herbs of slavery together with the matzoh of freedom. The charoset represents the mortar used by the Jews when they were slaves. This reminds us that there is always the hope of freedom when things are hard, and to remind us that that we can never forget our slavery in times of freedom.

14. Drink the fourth Cup of wine

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

15. Fill Miriam's cup with our cups of wine.

This cup of wine is in honour of Miriam and Elijah for their ability to stay connected to faith and to hope, even in times of extreme hardship. Remembering them means we can never fully experience the full joy of freedom until everyone in the world is free and can experience peace.

Traditionally, the last cup of wine has only honoured Elijah.

Why do we now include Miriam's contributions in this cup of wine?

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם!

16. Shulchan Orech (the Feast): Serve the holiday meal!

17. Tzafun

Let the kids find the afikoman and everyone shares it (in ancient times, Jews sacrificed a lamb which they ate at the end of the Passover Seder. The tzafun symbolizes this.)

Why on this night are some people still enslaved today?

What are some alternative “plagues” that continue to threaten people’s freedom and safety around the world?

Teaching of hate and violence,

Destruction of the earth,

Neglect of human needs,

Self-serving practices and sense of entitlement

Corruption in leadership and systems of “justice”

Subjugation of learning and human discourse,

The erosion of freedoms

Unawareness and ignorance

Fear that fuels xenophobia (and all the “isms”)

Other examples of modern-day plagues can be found at:

<https://www.haggadot.com/clip/ten-modern-plagues>

<https://www.adl.org/news/article/this-passover-think-of-the-modern-plagues>

I Am Tired of Sitting (Covid-19 Pandemic)

By Agnieszka H. Wolska, April 2020. Canada.

I am tired of
sitting
Sitting, lying down, eating, sitting again
Endless waiting and filling time with distraction

I am tired of reassuring
Myself, others, those close by and strangers on the internet
That we are all in this together

(at the same time, maybe, but not together. I am not together in this with the rich.

The homeless/marginalized/displaced/are not together in this with me.)

I am tired.
Bored, restless, afraid, then annoyed,
too stuffy and contained
and too sad to keep
putting out
“Inspirational content” or to
“Keep an online presence” so that I
“can hit the ground running” when
“this is all over”

When this is all over.
What will that look like?
Will it be like coming back from a really weird vacation?

What if I don't want to come back
I was already
So tried
Of running from here to there and back again
Tired of trying to look like “someone”
like someone “successful”, “educated”, “legitimate”,
“sophisticated”, “grounded”, “mindful”, “graceful”,
“committed”

“connected”

“dedicated”

I was so tired of never good enough

Never good enough, never positive enough, never brilliant
enough.

At least now

I am resting.

And it’s okay to just be.

Here and now perfection is dead.

Success is dying a surprisingly simple death.

What is left, beside the sitting, producing content

manicuring a presence

impressing

an invisible audience with only a handful of emojis for

expression

There is silence.

My own voice, sighing

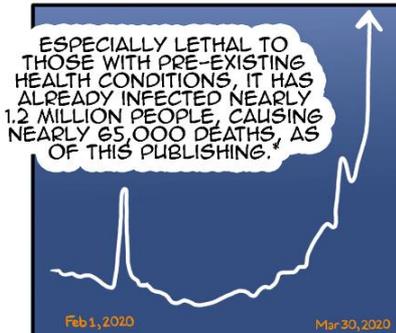
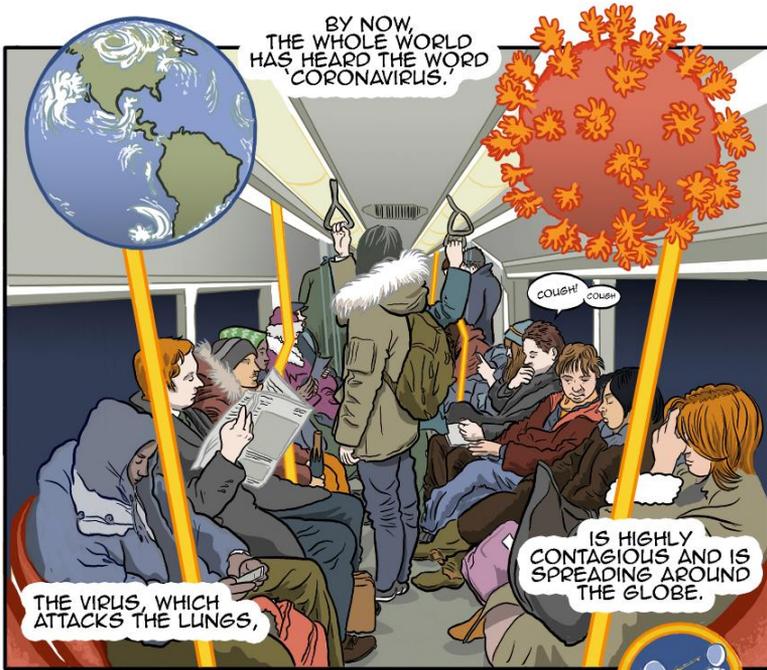
Body, sitting.



Cat by Kalina Wolska-Chaney, April 2020. Canada.

Take Care: A Community Response to Covid-19

Words by Hugh Goldring and art by Nicole Marie Burton of Ad Astra Comix, April 2020. Canada.



HEALTH AUTHORITIES HAVE RECOMMENDED LIMITING IN-PERSON HUMAN INTERACTION, FREQUENT HAND-WASHING, AND P.P.E.** WHEN GOING OUTSIDE.



* - SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2020
** - PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

TIME TO MASK UP!



RESPONSES AROUND THE WORLD HAVE DIFFERED.

SOUTH KOREA CONTROLLED THE SPREAD BY INSTITUTING A MASSIVE TESTING PROGRAM.

BUT IN ITALY, WHICH HAS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA THROUGH TRADE, MIGRATION, AND TOURISM,



THE VIRUS SPREAD RAPIDLY.*



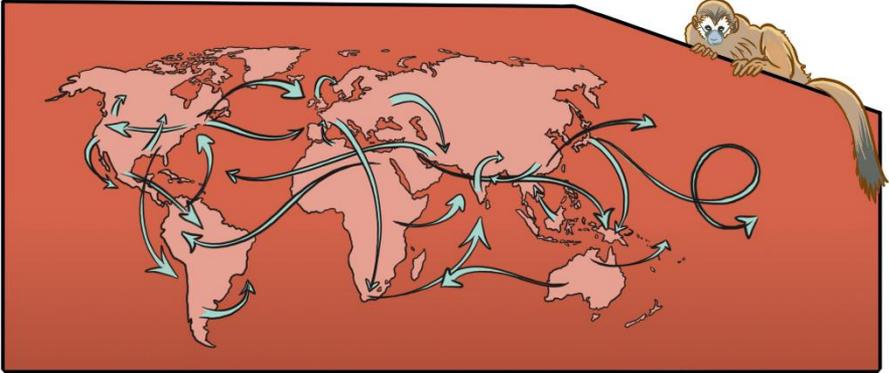
THE SURGE IN CASES COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED THE MEDICAL SYSTEM.



PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS CASES OF COVID-19 WERE LEFT TO DIE IN THEIR HOMES BECAUSE THERE WAS NOWHERE TO TREAT THEM, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT LOMBARDY, THE EPICENTER OF THE OUTBREAK, HAS ONE OF EUROPE'S BEST HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS.

* - OTHER FACTORS CONSIDERED IN ITALY'S COVID-19 SURGE WERE A HIGH POPULATION OF ELDERLY CITIZENS, DENSE URBAN CENTERS, AND A CULTURE OF YOUNG AND OLD INTERMINGLING MORE THAN OTHER COUNTRIES.

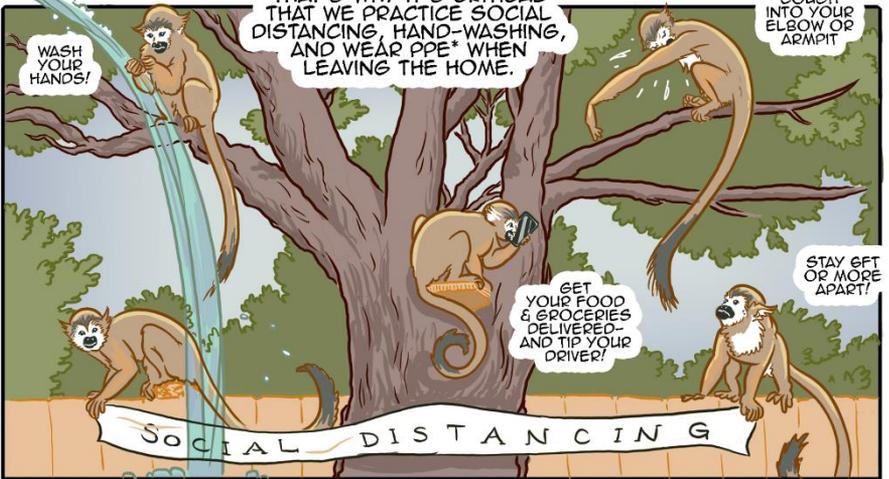
AT THIS POINT, IT'S TOO LATE TO CONTAIN THE VIRUS.



BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SLOW ITS SPREAD, TO EASE THE PRESSURE ON HOSPITALS AND GIVE SCIENTISTS TIME TO DEVELOP A VACCINE.



THAT'S WHY IT'S CRITICAL THAT WE PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING, HAND-WASHING, AND WEAR PPE* WHEN LEAVING THE HOME.



GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN SLOW TO IMPOSE QUARANTINE MEASURES,
ALLOWING THE VIRUS TO SPREAD.



NOW, THEY ARE ACTING,
BUT USING IT AS AN EXCUSE
TO ESTABLISH DANGEROUS
SECURITY MEASURES.



...AS WELL AS
YET ANOTHER
OPPORTUNITY
TO BAIL OUT
CORPORATIONS...

...EVEN
MAJOR
POLLUTERS
LIKE AIRLINES
(APPROX \$50B)
AND THE FOSSIL
FUEL INDUSTRIES.

ACROSS
THE WORLD,
PEOPLE HAVE
RESPONDED TO
THE CRUEL
INDIFFERENCE OF
GOVERNMENTS...

CALLING FOR
A RESPONSE
THAT BENEFITS
THE REST OF
US, NOT JUST
THE RICH.





DEMANDS INCLUDE EVICTION BANS,
RENT FREEZES AND BASIC INCOME,

AS WELL AS A
TOTAL SHUTDOWN
OF NON-ESSENTIAL
WORKPLACES.



BUT AS MANY OF US KNOW BY NOW, WE CAN'T COUNT ON THE
GOVERNMENT (LET ALONE PRIVATE INDUSTRY). IF WE DON'T TAKE CARE
OF EACH OTHER, NO ONE WILL.

LUCKILY, MUTUAL AID NETWORKS
ARE SPRINGING UP ALL OVER!



PEOPLE ARE
GETTING ORGANIZED:



DELIVERING GROCERIES TO
NEIGHBORS WHO CAN'T GO OUTSIDE,



PROVIDING
TEMPORARY HOUSING
TO DISPLACED PEOPLE...



FROM CHILDCARE MICRO CO-OPS,

TO MASSIVE RENT STRIKES, PEOPLE ARE DOING WHAT THEY NEED TO DO.



HOME SCHOOL IN SESSION

RENT STRIKE

...BUT A SUCCESSFUL STRIKE, LIKE ALL GOOD ORGANIZING, IS BUILT ON TRUST AND WE NEED TIME TO BUILD THAT TRUST WITH ONE ANOTHER.

SIX F*CKING FEET!

THIS PANDEMIC WON'T LAST FOREVER.



THINGS DON'T HAVE TO GO BACK TO NORMAL.

Contact Hugh and Nicole at petroglyphcomics at gmail.

Anarchism and Pandemics

By Hugh D.A. Goldring, March 2020. Canada.

How would we as anarchists confront a pandemic? Particularly in the face of people foolishly going out to crowded spaces in defiance of medical advice that we're currently seeing.

To me this is thorny but not especially complicated. If someone was running around murdering people you wouldn't need to call a general assembly to decide if you were going to stop them.

In anarchism "governance" I think there's kind of a trinity of factors to always consider: need, control by affected parties and relevant expertise. This is straightforward when you're managing a workplace or even planning a city, but it can be complicated in moments of crisis.

There's a very wrong David Harvey article where he says he doesn't trust anarchists because if there was a meltdown at a nuclear power plant they would have to have a general assembly to figure out what to do. Obviously, anarchists can have standard operating procedures. I think this is relevant in a pandemic.

Expert opinion is clear in this case: people need to stay inside. And everyone is affected, especially vulnerable populations. The situation is very urgent, plainly. If we don't act immediately then people will die. So, there's a kind of collective action problem, right? Do we restrict people's freedom to go out in public? How? What's the legitimate threshold for doing so?

First off, I don't think an anarchist society is viable long term if we don't undo the kind of selfish, scarcity-based behaviours that people develop under capitalism. So hopefully there will be a lot less anti-social behaviour. But there's always gonna be some people who are jerks or acting out their trauma or whatever.

So hell yeah, I think that an anarchist society should enforce a quarantine. I think it should anticipate that pandemics happen and develop procedures for confronting them. Hopefully pandemics will happen less often since anarchism ought to mean

the end of factory farming and hopefully something of a dispersal of populations from urban areas.

To circle back around, if for some reason there was a roving murder gang, anarchists wouldn't hold a GA and then deal with the murderers, they'd get it together to confront them directly and sort it out afterwards because the urgent need and the expert opinion (insofar as you need an expert opinion about whether murders are good, lol) converge: something has to be done right away. Even if that means restricting people's individual freedom, even if that literally means that they get dragged back to their house, or to be locked in somewhere (not a prison, but just an individual quarantine space) if it comes to that.

The mandate to do that comes from the policies, developed beforehand, by as broad a plurality of people as possible. In the moment, there can be no question of somebody's "democratic right" to be Typhoid Mary. And I think in the abstract people could be persuaded that yes, quarantine policies are necessary and require enforcement mechanisms to keep us all from dying. That way, when the time comes, everyone knows the deal. Who declares the quarantine? The relevant public health authority, I would think, though protocols would need to be developed with people who work in relevant production and service sectors (food, sewage, etc etc).

So yeah, I think anarchism is capable of handling pandemics and solving collective action problems, if we're serious about things.

Sober in Isolation

By Kay Fidler, April 2020. Canada.

hi hi hello, I'm going to start a thread about #isolation drinking. Backstory: I am a sober person (280 days and counting) who made a blood pact with the ghost of my mother to stay sober for the rest of my life.

to start, this thread is NOT about shaming anyone for their methods of coping. If you use any substance, that's chill w/ me and I won't judge you at all. I'm opening up about my personal experiences of #Sober #Quarantine.

this situation is a pretty stressful one for all of us - kind of like the holidays except we all might die and it's going to be months rather than weeks. so it makes sense that ppl would want to ease the anxious vibes w/ a box of wine or Costco-sized Texas mickey of vodka.

it starts to get sticky (read: triggering) for me when it seems like every other post is a photo of someone drinking a giant glass of something or live-drunk-tweeting. my safe-ish online spaces that are relatively easy to navigate (social media) are now minefields.

since the internet is literally all we (all of us that are physically isolating) have right now, you can begin to see where an issue begins to arise. If the only place to connect isn't safe anymore, then where does a triggered sober person go?

I think that we are all doing a beautiful job of staying connected & supporting one another, don't get me wrong. The ways I've seen people work around this distancing is mind-blowing and inspiring!

What I really want to ask is can those who use be mindful of those who don't? I know it's possible, but I can't do this without the help of others, I need my community to have my back on this one. hãy hãy!

<https://twitter.com/numberonecrushh/status/1243693620059729922?s=20>

Good Leadership in the Time of Corona

By Beatrice Aucoin, March 2020. Canada.

Condominium boards are the fourth level of government in Canadian settler society, I once read. As a director of my building's condominium corporation and this fourth level of government, I've been looking at what other levels of government are doing—and not doing—in dealing with COVID-19.

People are naturally and understandably anxious in situations like this, and part of being a leader means communicating continually, thoughtfully, and precisely with accurate information about what you are doing and what the people around you should be doing.

It's a huge responsibility, no matter how big or small your community is. In this case, I am steering the direction of a tower of 167 residential units in Calgary.

When it was clear that COVID-19 was becoming a global issue, the first thing I did was review the vendor contract with my building's cleaning contractor. What surfaces are being cleaned daily? What surfaces need to be added? Anything folks routinely touch in common areas needs to be sanitized daily.

That's when I brought in the rest of the board and property manager to the discussion. The other measure we took was to have hand sanitizer stations immediately added to key areas within the building. Because hand sanitizer is likely to be stolen, these stations are visible on common area security cameras.

I communicated these things to my building's Facebook group along with another vital piece discussing how we can support each other. (The name of my building has been redacted for privacy.)

“If you live in [our building] and end up under quarantine because of novel coronavirus/COVID-19, you might find that your supplies run low over those 14 days. You may or may not have local friends and family who can drop off food, pet supplies, and basic toiletries. I invite anyone who lives here and needs

neighbour assistance in obtaining necessities during a quarantine to post here and/or PM me. If you're under quarantine and find out you have a parcel sitting out in the open in the lobby, PM me and I'll make sure you get it.

We can all work together to figure out how best to coordinate aid to neighbours in need. I have your backs, everyone, and will do my best to make sure residents who need this type of support get it and know they aren't alone."

I am continually updating my community on available resources such as a local grocery store offering a free essentials care package delivery to folks who are quarantined. I address people's concerns. This is what responsible and compassionate leadership looks like to me.

We might end up physically isolated, but that doesn't mean we are alone. Being a good leader in the time of corona means both supporting your community with appropriate care and resources and creating the space for neighbourly connections.

Fast forward to a month later:

Sometimes being a good leader means standing up for the safety of the overall community and shutting down selfish capitalist cries of those who think using their Airbnbs for quarantine profiteering on the backs and health of their neighbours is good. These folks aren't the majority, which makes me happy, but they are loud: all caps, all anger, all the time.

They can wear me down. They are angry and scared and have transferred their uncertainties onto me as a person because I am an easier and more accessible target than COVID-19 or economic collapse. No matter what, I won't let them or others be quarantine profiteers in this building. I have other leaders in my building who stand with me and agree that capitalism stops right there.

I have safe spaces to vent so I am expressing my feelings appropriately and can get on with what I need to do for the good of the people who live here. I carry on because I'm leading this building in public health. I carry on because I have to.

Novel: A Pandemic Love Poem

By Kay Fidler, April 2020. Canada.

Happy to be the Big
To your Little
Spoon
Flickers of eyelid match our
Hearts beat out of sync
This snuggle outside of space time
Quickens
Fascinating
Listening ear press'd against
Armpit flesh
Lashes tickle moan beat beat beat
Your chest organic
Bloody
Watery human mess contain'd
Acts as an amplifier for my own drum
Drumming drum drum
Kit falls down a hill
Ba dum bum tchhh
Wait
Flicker again for me
I can hear my own heart pounding
Through your ribcage
I am winning this race
Then again, no one ever really wins or loses.

Mixed media pair

By Callan Field, April, 2020. Alberta, Canada.



Dear Albertans,
During a pandemic I continued to cut healthcare and educational resources.
Because you're worth it.
Sincerely,
Jason Kenney

Health Link
4th Advice 24/7



Sheidon M. Chumir
1212 4th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta T2R 0K7



POSTES
CANADA
POST
00.87
12R 3M2 2019 08 21
P80315171007
003894 9KB JM
0821 124739

Dear Front-Line- Medical Workers:
I see what you are risking for us,
and I am profoundly grateful. You deserve
governments and policies that actively
protect and support the essential
public service you provide not just
during a pandemic, but everyday.
I will do my best to fight for you and
all that you stand for.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

2

Dear Front-Line Medical Workers:

I see what you are risking for us, and I am profoundly grateful.

You deserve governments and policies that actively protect and support the essential public service you provide not just during a pandemic, but everyday.

I will do my best to fight for you and all that you stand for.

When Everyone is Flailing, It Kind of Looks Like Dancing

By Tiffany, Agnieszka, Lori, Joel, Amy, Sonia, Rosie, Mim, Joel, Julia, Marisa, L., J. March and April 2020. Canada, Australia, Austria, United States of America.

This is a small collective document resulting from three video chat conversations between a group of narrative practitioners.

Agnieszka Wolska came up with our lovely title!

This document has been written as an invitation for readers to join with us as we go through this pandemic. Although our chats covered a wide range of topics, this document focuses on what we shared about how the pandemic is effecting us personally, and includes narrative questions to invite you into this part of our conversation.

(If you are interested in receiving the other documents that are in process following our chats, please get in touch! We are working on creating a narrative practice document that includes ideas for how narrative practitioners can help community members during this pandemic, and a second document with self-guided narrative questions for anyone to work through.)

Our conversations included intentional discussion of the effect of the pandemic, isolation, and quarantine, in our own lives. We started here because we, as therapists, are not separate from this global context. Although each of us has a unique experience that is shaped by our age, race, socioeconomic class, ability, and our own personal, familial, and cultural histories of trauma and resilience, we are still part of this world alongside the community members who come to us for therapeutic conversations.

We want to honour this interconnectedness, without overwriting the reality of difference. We recognize that although the whole world is responding to the pandemic, there are vast differences in what that response looks like. Privilege, power, and our

position within systems and structures of oppression are very real factors in how we each experience this time.

Grounding ourselves in our own lived experience of the pandemic is a political act, and joins us in a narrative therapy legacy of recognizing power and challenging the idea of neutrality or objectivity in the culture of therapy. In 1998, Michael White wrote that, “The culture of therapy does not have some privileged location outside of the culture at large... The culture of therapy is not exempt from the politics associated with the hierarchies of knowledge and the politics of marginalization.”

We recognize that we are not separate from the experience of the pandemic, and that we do not have any mythical “objectivity” or special expertise when it comes to living through a pandemic. Although we each bring tender and intentional care to our work as therapists, we ground ourselves here as people who are going through this experience alongside everyone else. We reject a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges our training as therapists above the insider knowledges of our community members.

Here are some of the ways that the pandemic is impacting our lives, and some questions to invite you to join with us in responding to these impacts:

“It’s been a very physical experience for me.”

J noted that suddenly working from home, offering therapy sessions from home, meant that they have to be “ready the whole day to be ‘on’... it feels like an awareness of the level of physiological activation. Finding a way to attenuate that, care for that, nurture that, feels like where I am right now, in terms of what I need to do for myself.”

This physical aspect to the experience - our bodies holding tension around our work in a different way than we’re used to - is made more intense by the fact that many of the ways we might decompress after a day of work are no longer available to use. Coffee shops, time away from our place of work - these are all out of reach right now, and for some unknown distance into the future.

Agnieszka shared that, “In my circle of therapists that I am in contact with; peers, and people I’m in training with, and so on, I’m noticing this little tension about how we as therapists ought to be better equipped to handle our sympathetic nervous system in this situation. And that, by now, it being three weeks here in Canada, we should be up and going and getting back into training and learning new skills and practising them, and you know, really creating, with ease and comfort, this safe container for our clients.”

This pressure to handle our nervous systems, to handle our emotions, and the physical experiences of our bodies, is one that many of us have experienced! It also shows up in expectations to handle our physical space. As Julia mentioned, this includes pressures to make our homes look like they are not lived in, to make them “professional” for video calls. These are all expectations that influence our physical selves and contexts.

We also talked about expectations of how we should dress and look, and how declining to cooperate with some of these expectations can be an act of resistance. This doesn’t mean showing up to a narrative conversation with a community member in our housecoats, but it might mean choosing to connect with our colleagues in a chat, resisting the voice of expectation that we should be “properly” presentable in order to show up.

Maybe you are also having a physical experience of living through this pandemic!

What are these physical effects for you?

How are you responding to this physical experience?

Have you ever been in a situation that was also a very physical experience, where your physiological activation (to use J’s evocative phrase!) was present in exceptional or notable ways?

Do have skills of caring for, and nurturing, your physical self?

What are the histories of these skills?

How are you staying connected to these skills during this pandemic?

Are you taking any actions in your physical space to resist pressures or expectations of “professionalism”?

Are there ways in which your physical space is supporting or nurturing you right now?

We're navigating capitalism, privilege, and money

Mim shared, “I am weighing up the fact that I have been privileged enough to work a corporate job in the past... and have that savings, so I'm offering dramatically cheap therapy for those who can't afford it, like if they have casual work and they don't have savings, and they just need someone to talk to.”

Offering sliding scale is something that multiple people in our group consider a precious part of our work, and we are weighing how to continue to offer that while also trying to survive under capitalism. Mim said, “capitalism makes us feel that our worth is in what we own, and what we earn, and as an act of resistance we try to practice collaboration. Everyone's in a precarious situation.”

For those of us in private practice, one impact of this pandemic is fear about how we will continue to work.

L shared, “The worry for me is about my practice. In the last little while I've finally got the ball rolling and now things are petering out again.”

Agnieszka shared, “I started a small private practice about two months ago, and it is screeching to a halt. It's just... I would love to have some clients. And I just don't. I feel like it's going to end. Or at least it's going to be transformed by this in a significant way.”

This experience of worrying about our practices challenges us not only in how we view ourselves as therapists (are we offering a valuable and valued service? Are we doing good work? Do we know what we're doing?) but also challenges us in material ways (will we make enough money to pay rent? Can we support

ourselves and our families? If we lose too much business, how will we move forward?)

Sonia shared, “I was having a conversation with my boss. I’ve got in a fairly new role in the team, I’m still on probation, and they’re talking about ‘well how come you’re doing family therapy online when we have to have everybody together, etcetera, etcetera.’ And I said is my job okay? I’m certainly having conversations with people who have lost work and have lost income and are navigating all sorts of things around how to hold onto rentals and all that.”

These material realities cannot be ignored or glossed over. And they are different for each of us! Some of us are financially buffered, and others are not. We experience the effects of capitalism differently, depending on our specific context. For those of us (and our community members) who are dealing with precarity, these material realities may be more pressing and more urgent than how we make meaning out of our experiences.

As J noted, “I can imagine jumping to meaning making and values feeling out of place if we were to move there too soon... how do we talk about these material realities of struggle and inequality in a narrative way?”

In narrative therapy, this is sometimes referred to as “the river and the riverbank.”

David Denborough, in *Retelling the Stories of Our Lives*, writes, “If our life is in turmoil, it’s like a river, fast flowing and full of hazards and dangers. If we’re in the middle of a fast-flowing river, it may not be the time to talk about those hazards or dangers. Instead, all our efforts may need to go into immediate survival. We need to find a way to step out of the turmoil and the fast-flowing water and up onto the riverbank, where we can then look down upon our own life.”

J suggests that we might, “Trust that you can open up enough space for the problem and then you can open up space for something else once you’ve given it room.”

We think this applies both within and beyond narrative conversations.

“I haven’t yet found a way to talk about this.”

Many of us find ourselves having therapeutic conversations that feel awkward, hesitant, tentative. It’s hard to know how to talk about how we (and our community members) are moving through this time because we don’t have road maps or clear paths forward.

J said, “I think there are probably lots of problems that we might be used to encountering where we go, yeah that is an incredibly hard problem, and I have lots of examples of people who have moved through it. And it’s maybe just, for me it feels like maybe a failure of imagination that I can’t imagine the other side of this problem clearly enough to feel comfortable sitting in it.”

How can we talk about what we can’t yet imagine?

How can we sit with the discomfort of not knowing the path forward?

This is a question that I think many of us - narrative practitioners and parents and workers and anyone else... we are having to sit with. What can we imagine next? What comes after this? And, as we noted earlier, sometimes we can’t even get to this imagining, or this connection to possibility and hope, until we’ve figured out how to get through what is right in front of us.

Tiffany shared, “It’s been hard to talk about what the feelings are... I’m noticing that the feelings are being referenced and I haven’t yet found a way to elicit rich stories about those feelings in ways that give people a sense of agency or connection to their values.”

This sense of uncertainty was shared by a few of us.

This can influence how we experience ourselves as practitioners. Some of these influences are richly rewarding, inviting us be more conscious about challenging ideas of practitioner “expertise” and offering us opportunities to centre the insider

knowledges of our community members more visibly. Some of these influences are more challenging, eroding our sense of being connected to skills, contributing to feelings of powerlessness or helplessness, and putting us at odds with expectations of “skillfulness” and “effectiveness.”

There can be a lot of pressures on us as practitioners. Rosie shared, “I mean in our work, it strikes me that the expectations on therapists are already pretty unattainable. And only really possible because of peer support that we do, you know, for free, on our own time. Or just snatched moments in between.”

These pressures land on practitioners, but they also land on parents, who similarly find themselves (ourselves!) faced with increasing lack of support and unattainable expectations. And similarly on health care workers, cleaners, and so many others.

J shared:

“I actually had such a funny conversation with a client, in which she expressed feelings of great preparedness because she had lived in poverty for a lot of her life.

It was really interesting, and I started inviting her expertise and asking if I could consult her a little bit. Because she says she knows how to be frugal, she knows how to downsize and, you know, stretch a package of chicken or what have you.

And she had also gone through some big disruption in her life and was expecting herself to feel quite destabilised at this point. And was experiencing herself in a way that was quite surprising which was pretty calm and pretty cool. I was so struck by this client for whom her lived experience made her more expert in how to deal with this.”

Agnieszka shared:

“I recently had conversations with my mom, who grew up in post-World War Poland and then in Poland under the communist regime. And my parents are both very peaceful with what’s happening, and they’re also telling stories of food shortages and waiting in line for toilet paper. And

they're not recalling these things as any kind of trauma, but as opportunities to have become tough and resourceful. They see themselves as having really gone through things and you know, life without toilet paper is really not a challenge [laughs]. There are so many solutions. And even I remember those times. It's really interesting to listen to them. I find it really helpful right now to touch base with them, just hear, just listen to their stories of those experiences."

This was a significant theme through our three chats - noticing the expertise of our community members, and 'consulting our consultants' (inviting our community members to share their insider knowledges in ways that highlight their special expertise). We see special expertise being highlighted within communities that have experienced poverty, within sick and disabled communities, and within communities of refugees and immigrants, among others.

Mim shared, "I really am trying to focus on the fact that it's bringing us to notice things about our own lives that we didn't appreciate before. So, you know, our worth being located in what we do with our lives and who we are and through our work and what is this opportunity now giving us and telling us about our relationships, about our identity, about our values outside of our work."

Our community members are enriching our own lives deeply through the perspectives that they share with us in narrative conversations.

We also see ways in which our community members are experiencing the same disorientation and disconnection from feelings of skillfulness that we might be feeling ourselves. We see this particularly in areas where cherished coping strategies and skills have become less accessible, such as loss of access to gym spaces, loss of community and social spaces.

Mim shared, "All these weird things are happening it's hitting our egos, it's hitting our relationship with our bodies and our routines."

Maybe you are also experiencing moments of awkwardness, uncertainty, or disorientation!

If so, what are the areas in which you feel this disorientation or disconnection from skills or agency?

What would you name the skills or values, or the ways of being, that are being impacted by the social context of this pandemic?

What do you cherish about these skills or values or ways of being?

Is there a sparkling story that you can tell about a time when you felt close to these skills, values, or ways of being?

Are there any aspects of these skills, values, or ways of being that are accessible to you right now?

What might your hesitancy or uncertainty say about what you cherish?

What might become possible if you stay with the uncertainty for a while?

And maybe you are able to imagine possibility because your communities have been through hard times before! This is especially true for Indigenous, Black, refugee, disabled, trans, and queer communities.

Has your community experienced intense hardship in the past?

What was this hardship?

What are the values or skills that allowed your community to get through these hard times or to respond to them?

What does your community know about surviving hard times, that might help folks get through this pandemic?

“Within this bubble, what value can we take?”

In our own lives, and in our conversations with community members, we are noticing invitations (sometimes very insistent

invitations!) to, as Lori put it, “reshuffle priorities and think about what’s most important.”

We noticed that these priorities include dealing with pressures around productivity. Being productive, valuing ourselves based on our productivity, feeling pressure from social media spaces to “use this time” in the best ways (conflicting pressures to both be productive and also to be non-productive, to rest, to reset - sometimes neither productivity nor rest seems accessible right now!)

Mim suggested that we might start asking about the history of “why it’s so important to be productive.”

If productivity has been important in your life, what is the history of that being valued?

Who determined that it was important?

Have there been times in your life when you were less productive?

How did you feel in those times of being less productive?

What do you value in your life?

What is the history of these values?

What do you want this to have meant in 6 months?

Once we’re through the curve, what do you want to look back on and appreciate about how you handled it, or how you were connected with your values?

“How do I sustain that feeling of being in it together?”

In 2013, Calgary experienced a massive flood. J shared, “I had a moment on Monday... This is gonna be the most Calgary thing I’ve ever said in my life, but - [laughs] but that sort of like, that sort of flood solidarity? You know that feeling of like, here we are together, in trying to hold up a community through a really hard thing.”

For so many of us, even those of us not in Calgary, this is one of the strongest threads of shared experience; a hope for

community, a desire to connect community together and to be in community with each other. To find and foster solidarity.

J shared, “I guess I feel like that’s what I want to extend out to the community, is that sense of being in this together, not in it for ourselves, and that the helping roles, you know, that are available, are part of that continuity for people of being in it together.”

Lori shared, “I guess for me, [a hope] one is to, through conversations with folks who are struggling right now, keep the community piece in mind. And the other hope I have is to help reduce people’s sense of isolation and actual isolation.”

Joel shared, “We all have something specifically in common. We’re all contending with something together. This has never happened before or not at least that I can think of in the history of the planet, certainly in the history of civilised planet-ness. And everybody that we work with is as well.”

Maybe you are also hoping to sustain a sense of solidarity!

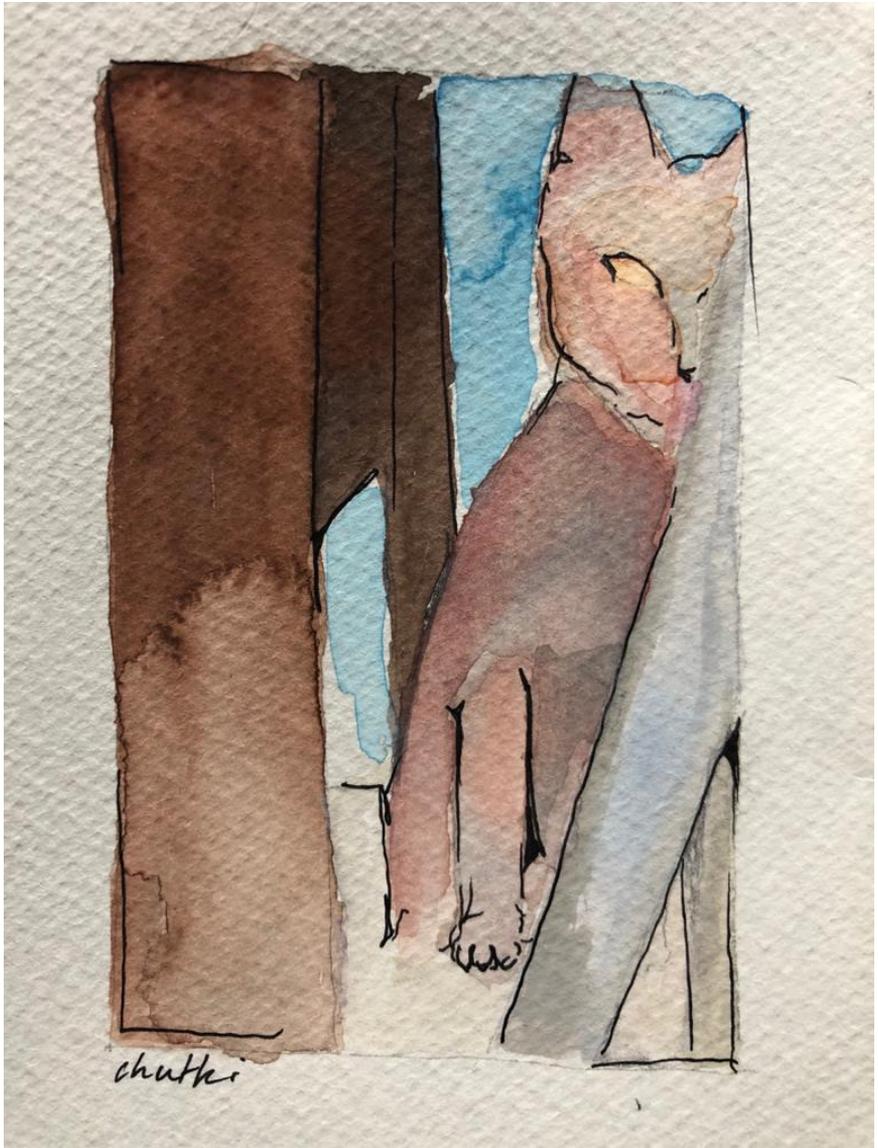
In Calgary, the flood narrative is a heartening one for people, because it is an example of a time when the city really came together. Are there stories like this in your own community (family, city, community group, friend group, culture, etc.)?

Have there been times in your own history when you have felt a sense of solidarity or connection?

What did that sense of solidarity or connection, or ‘being in it together’, make possible for you?

Are you able to connect to those feelings now, during the pandemic?

Is there anyone supporting you in a sense of community or solidarity?



Cat by Anisha Uppal-Sullivan, April 2020. UAE.

Conclusion

I hope that this document has offered you some comfort, some connection, or some sense of community and care.

If any of the work in this document was particularly moving for you, or resonated for you, or made something new possible in your life, please get in touch with us and let us know. You can send feedback and responses to Tiffany Sostar at sostarselfcare@gmail.com, and these will be forwarded to the author or artist.

This zine was created on Treaty 7 land, and we recognize the violence that has been done to Indigenous communities through ongoing colonization, and the resilience and survivance of those communities. This pandemic differentially impacts Indigenous communities, and brings up cultural trauma related to pandemics.

ABOUT TIFFANY SOSTAR

I am a narrative therapist, community organizer, writer, editor, workshop facilitator, and online course creator. I am a white settler and am bisexual, non-binary, polyamorous, and fibromyalgia-enhanced. I offer individual, relationship, and group therapy.

I love community organizing, and I especially love collective documentation. I run monthly discussion groups (online during the pandemic!) and teach a six-month online course in narrative therapy and speculative fiction (among other courses).

If you'd like to work with me or get involved in other projects, contact me at sostarselfcare@gmail.com or www.tiffanysostar.com. If there is a project that you would like to see created, please let me know.

I do not have any grant funding for this work. You can support me at www.patreon.com/sostarselfcare.