

COVID-19 Narrative

Noelle Coniglio
March 10th, 2020

I am distracted. The room is buzzing. I catch murmurs of the latest coronavirus cases floating around the room as easily as I might catch the disease itself. Kirk Branch, our professor walks in. His head is down, his eyes betraying that his mind is also otherwise occupied.

The murmurs crescendo into uproar as we begin the conversation of transitioning to online school. This dive from normalcy feels unfair, unwarranted. The cover of normalcy, of attending our classes every day at their same time as we always have, is our privilege. We are in America, not Wuhan. We are in Bozeman, Montana. We are supposed to feel safe and distant from global affairs.

We circle back to writing. *Journal*, Kirk urges. *These are strange times we are living in.*

I leave the classroom, unaware that it was my last class of college, ever. Unaccepting that we are approaching the unknown.

March 11th, 2020

The flight from Bozeman drops me in Seattle, the epicenter of America's coronavirus cases. When I emerge into the airport, I see my dad, and behind him, I see a young couple in blue masks, standing casually at their gate. My dad hugs me and points to my mom, sitting just down the hallway. We are meeting to fly to Reno and surprise my sister who is racing at Junior Nationals in Truckee, California. This trip was planned before the blue masks appeared, before Washington had a confirmed death from COVID-19.

I choose to stand on one floor tile, its edges the boundaries to the bustle around me. The airport traffic flows turbulently through the hallway as travelers attempt to reach their gates without touching or breathing their surroundings. Blue masks bob through, like little blue bubbles swept in the current. I pull the peanut butter sandwich from my backpack I made to avoid purchasing any possibly contaminated Seattle food and munch quietly within the confines of my floor tile.

March 12th, 2020

My sister is crying and avoiding me. The races are canceled. My mom got the call this morning as I ordered my rooibos chai at Coffeebar in Truckee. I received the email shortly afterwards that school was officially online. I would never set foot in a college classroom again.

"Morgan," I start but she walks off. We stand by the Team Alaska tent at the race venue and she is packing her skis away. She carefully settles each pair back into the bag as if she is laying a body to rest. I wonder if right now, packing her skis, is the only ceremony she will get to resolve her senior season and all she has worked for the past years. It feels so cripplingly unfair.

March 13th, 2020

"We are skiing Squallywood!" I cheer, attempting to infuse some excitement back into Morgan. With no Nordic races, my family decides to make the most of our ever-evolving trip and ski Squaw Valley, the playground of legendary Shane McConkey and setting of the infamous ski movie, G.N.A.R.

We have no alpine gear with us, so we rent full packages and hit the slopes. The mountain is one part slush, one part ice, and skis differently than the Montana cold smoke I have grown spoiled with. My rental skis alternately chatter and stick but I feel like an alpine hero amongst the uncoordinated tourists and Bay Area weekend warriors sliding down the slopes.

Morgan's pink hair flutters in the breeze and a smile slowly grows on her face. I snap a picture of her on the summit, arms in the air, grin wide. In this moment, I feel so removed from the changes, from the realizations our world is drastically changing. All I can see is Lake Tahoe in the distance and the ski lifts, still traveling their rhythmic loops up and down the mountain.

March 14th, 2020

Apocalypse shopping has hit Trader Joes. My mom and sister and I wander the aisles of the novelty store absent from both Alaska and Montana, but we are met with empty shelves. Morgan is looking for "Everything but the Bagel" seasoning to gift our friend, but she can't find it. I scout for the Trader Joe's salted caramel chocolate bars but when I find their shelf, they're missing.

This is craziness, I think. First the toilet paper, and then nonperishables, and now luxury items like chocolate bars? All gone? Not only is COVID-19 spreading, so is fear, and fear is equally contagious.

I think of the doomsday preppers with their silly shows on the Discovery Channel and survivalist religious sects and how they must be laughing in vindication. And yet, despite the bare shelves before me, it still doesn't feel real. The world is still turning, I'm still on vacation, people are still just buying their groceries at Trader Joes. Right?

March 15th, 2020

Back in Bozeman. It is a ghost town. There are no college kids on Main, nor tourists, nor families out for Sunday brunch.

"This is how I like my town. This is like how it was when I was a kid," says Ben as we drive down Main, ogling the emptiness. "All it took was a global pandemic to bring it back!"

March 16th, 2020

"Um, Noelle . . ."

I look up from my skis to Ben ahead of me on the skin track.

"Do you, uh, feel short of breath at all?" he asks. "I just feel really uncharacteristically short of breath . . ."

"Um, kinda. I have a headache and I feel kinda nauseous," I reply, noting the pounding in my head. We look at each other and groan.

"We've got the 'roni!" Ben proclaims, "the 'roni" his new catchphrase for the coronavirus.

"No, we could just have a normal coronavirus," I say, not wanting to admit the possibility of increasing the Gallatin County COVID-19 count.

"But you just flew through Seattle. We could totally have it. Ugh, too bad we can't get tested, stupid government . . ." Ben grumbles.

We start to skin again, slowly, choosing to only ski Mt. Blackmore instead of the Blackmore to Hyalite Peak traverse we'd planned for the day. Each step feels heavy, laden with the burden of potentially carrying coronavirus.

March 19th, 2020

One year. Our anniversary. We'd hoped for a nice dinner at a nice restaurant where we'd finally dress nicely for once, but they're all closed.

The early morning drive to the Beartooths is in a snowstorm and we discover my low beams have gone out over Bozeman Pass. The rest of the drive proceeds like we're in Star Wars hyperspeed, snowflakes zooming past like stars. We hurtle down the highway blindly, understanding vaguely where we are going.

We reach East Rosebud and skin for the Chamonix Couloir, our equivalent of a romantic anniversary trip to France. Clouds coat everything in dense, wet cotton. We can't find the couloir so we climb up something random and try our best to avoid rocks on the ski down. My stomach growls and I think about the two king crab legs in the freezer leftover from Valentine's Day.

"How about crab?" I ask Ben.

March 21st, 2020

Sun beams down optimistically. I hang back in my harness, looking at Emigrant's snowy summit in the distance. The Yellowstone winds shallowly under Carter's Bridge, ferrying spring run-off. I feel the warm, dry rock in my grip. The world feels like its waking up.

Birds flit between the branches of the trees at Allenspur. I wonder if the animals can sense all the ways in which the world is changing.

March 22nd, 2020

Ben floats the *Alpinist* article on his phone beneath my nose. I read the title. "Coronavirus Can Live on Rock, *Real Rock*."

"Well, shoot, I guess climbing's off the table now," I say.

March 23rd, 2020

"School" has resumed. It mostly consists of me checking my email and reading posts from my professors. I keep writing this log.

Mara draws flowers for five hours. Tessa and Marika attend online lectures. We FaceTime John. He has pneumonia. Great.

March 24th, 2020

COVID-19 has allowed our hobbies to flourish. I am oddly grateful for some aspects of this virus, I realize, as I combine oats, butter, brown sugar, and cinnamon to make the topping for my apple crumble.

The roommates and I are baking today. Everything is Gluten Free so Tessa can indulge as well. We decided we might as well eat our way through this pandemic.

March 26th, 2020

We are going to make a music video. It will be to R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World as We Know It". Ben played the song at lunch as we all poured over the latest news updates. He queued it with a cheeky grin and we all burst into manic laughter that slowly faded as its hyperbolic message sank in for the first time ever with frightening accuracy.

March 27th, 2020

I email Prof D., the wisest man I know.

Hi Prof D,

Just thought I'd check in and see how, as an inherently social creature, you're doing with this über-fun social distancing thing?

I am still in Montana, despite all the articles and fear-tactics currently being employed by my mother to persuade me to go back to Alaska. She's pretty paranoid I'll end up on a ventilator if I get COVID-19. She learned I fall into the high risk category as my stint with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever last summer may have left me with permanent lung scarring, so now I wake up every morning to a text with at least two new articles about the virus. At least she cares about me :)

My roommates, boyfriend (Ben), and I have chosen to be isolation buddies and we're leaving our house only if we need food or to go play outside far away from others. Ben moved in to minimize contact with others since he's afraid of getting me sick and his roommates are doing a piss-poor job social distancing. We're also cultivating new hobbies. For instance, this weekend, we plan to make a music video to R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World as We Know It," a song whose hyperbolic message has never rung truer than now. We also hosted a virtual Gluten Free baking challenge with our friends, which was problematic since we couldn't taste anyone else's

creations to prove whose was most successful. (Personally, I'm putting my money on my apple cobbler.) Oh, and we discovered a bag of googely eyes in our craft drawer, so we've been randomly super-gluing googely eyes to things all over the house. I found a pair looking back at me from the toilet paper dispenser yesterday which was oddly unsettling.

In the midst of this strange pandemic and feeling like the world is truly falling apart before our eyes, I feel curiously well. If anything, I think this experience is solidifying to me the power love and community-consciousness hold. Falling asleep next to Ben last night, (we have to share a bed now which is kind of a bummer because I like my space but he didn't believe me that the couch was sooooo much more comfortable,) he looked at me and said, "Honestly, I feel like everything is going to shit right now but I feel so much more grounded being in it all next to you." And he was right. In others, I am finding peace and wellness.

I hope that you are well and also in the midst of developing obscure hobbies. I will totally mail you some googely eyes if you want some.

All my best,

Noelle

March 28th, 2020

WE GET A PUPPY!!! Well, Ben's family gets one. She is our attempt to cure the stir-crazy, cabin-fever vibes and bring some pure joy into our lives. So many people are getting puppies. There's probably never been a more lucrative time to be a breeder.

Our drive back from the Mennonite Ranch west of Anaconda is full of so many "oohs" and "awes" they make their own symphony.

Rosie, the six-week-old black lab puppy, snuggles in the middle seat between Ben and I. Her black fur is so soft and she smells so warm and new. It's crazy to realize that the world she was born into has always been in pandemic-mode.

March 30th, 2020

Our last day in Hyalite before the road closes. Ben and I ski the longest run off Hyalite Peak. The snow is the best we've skied this season and sunshine illuminates the surrounding ranges. For a minute, I feel like nothing has changed. We are moving among mountains like we always have, smiling and together.

The trailhead parking lot is a strange affair. It's full because everyone is trying to get in their last runs, last hikes, whatever, but people are projecting palpable distance between each other. Friends yell over cars at their friends to see how they're doing but don't approach them. On the trail, people held their breath when you passed, out of altruism or self-preservation it's unclear.

I pull off my ski boots and plop into the passenger seat of the car. "I've honestly never had the need to go to a brewery and have a beer with a bunch of friends, but now that I can't do it, I suddenly want it," I say and Ben laughs.

"Forbidden fruit is always the sweetest."

April 1st, 2020

I don't want to do school work. I don't want to study for an MCAT that will probably be cancelled again and postponed indefinitely. I don't want to work on my research project.

It is so hard, so fucking hard, to do work in my house. When school was physically in session, I never did homework at home, partly because I can't concentrate here and partly because home is where I like to unwind and be separated from work. If my house is my temple, working here is sacrilege.

All I can think about is the window table at Rockford where Bryce, Jordan, Alanna, and I would congregate on Thursday mornings, sipping lattes and tackling the day's agenda. We'd chat and work and somehow, everything that needed to get done would.

I make myself some French press and add oat milk in consolation, but the coffee is weak and I stare at the crisscrossing patterns of the living room rug, trying to figure out where one woven flower ends and another one begins. I soon give up, lost in the fibrous continuum.

April 3rd, 2020

My feet carry me over the rocks and dead grass of the Beartrap Canyon trail. Ben flies ahead of me, carried on his lean rocket booster legs. This is my first run of the year on a dry trail and the first run since knee surgery that my biomechanics feel fluid and natural. It is a feeling I relish because for the first time in a long time, my body feels like it's moving like normal.

Normal.

What does that mean?

Is normal the absence of a sensation? Is it a deficiency of change?

Is it the unobtrusive feeling of ordinariness that dully coats our existences like a ubiquitous anesthetic?

Can we only feel it when it's gone?

April 5th, 2020

Ben and I meet Paul at the cow pasture "trailhead" to Frazier Basin. It feels wasteful for three people to take two separate cars to ski at the same place. I think about the surge in disposable products and decrease in car-pooling brought on by this pandemic. Coronavirus is deadly to a host of things, the economy and Mother Nature included.

We stick our skins to our bases and I realize how much I've missed Paul's skinny smile. He tells me about how stir crazy he feels and his desperate search for a sourdough starter because the grocery stores are permanently out of yeast. "I just want to bake bread! But I also probably shouldn't because I feel like all I do is eat different baked goods these days. When this is over, I'll be *rolling* myself out of isolation."

I laugh because I am all-too-familiar with the quarantine baking craze. Linnea gave John The Nordic Cookbook for his birthday last month and he's been transforming pounds of butter into golden, beautiful pastries almost daily. My spirits have been buoyed by the aromas of cinnamon and cardamom but I fear my pants are taking the brunt of it.

"You can make a starter from flour and water in an open container. It catches yeast that's in the air. My mom did it and she's making really good sourdough," says Ben.

"You can catch all kinds of things in the air," I say.

April 6th, 2020

We steal Rosie. Again. I don't feel very productive in the homework department today so I assuage my guilt by trying to teach Rosie how to fetch.

It is sunny and warm and we play in the confused grass of my front yard which cannot figure out whether it's supposed to start growing. Rosie finds a cigarette butt in the gutter and I pull it from her sharp puppy teeth. A woman bikes by and smiles, trying to be nice but clearly thinking I'm yet another irresponsible college kid who's coping with a puppy.

"Sue me," I think and toss the cig back into the gutter.

April 7th, 2020

The Deep Creek snow at 1:00 pm is heavy, ligament-death snow and I cautiously turn my way through the dead trees. Meredith, another ACL-surgery victim, is ahead of me employing the same careful technique.

It's Lady Ski Day. Marika and I met Cora and Meredith at the Deep Creek trailhead for a pleasant girls-only couloir mission. The conversation feels natural; the laughter feels real. I forget COVID-19 exists until we make it back to our three separate cars.

April 8th, 2020

Perhaps my first productive day of this whole quarantine. I start my final research paper for my grant and write multiple citation-loaded paragraphs. The writing transpires in my yard in the sunshine. My skin starts to get hot and when I return inside for a snack break, I discover I have a horrific t-shirt burn. "At least I'm never in public anymore," I think as I slather on consolation sunscreen.

April 10th, 2020

The sun is beaming again and it's theoretically University Day and we "don't have school" so Ben and I head for Spire Rock outside of Pipestone in hopes of finding secluded, people-free climbing.

The land around Spire Rock is dry and arid and I feel like I've stepped into late July. There is one party of climbers on The Queen, the smaller conglomerate, so we mosey up to The King to pick a route. I look out at the snowy Tobacco Roots and think about this bipolar spring,

wondering when it will pick a season. The thick snow clouds on the horizon remind me how much remains uncertain.

April 11th, 2020

My house holds a dinner party for ourselves. We all dress in our fanciest attire and John, our resident bar tender, serves basil mojitos on the rocks. The six of us dine on steak, au gratin potatoes, and garlic green beans. Marika surprises everyone with decadent homemade Baked Alaska for desert. Frank Sinatra sings in the background and we turn on the twinkle lights in the living room and dance. It is a celebration simply of living.

Ben twirls me around proudly. "My high school gym teacher used to make me dance with her in front of the whole class," he laughs, "Partly because I was such a screw-off, partly because I had the best moves." We all dance in front of the large living room window facing 10th Street, on display for the whole neighborhood. I hope that someone is watching, I hope they feel inspired.

April 12th, 2020

Ben's mom giggles. "Okay, it's time for the Easter egg hunt!"

Today is Easter, perhaps the first ever where churches are empty of their congregations. I considered streaming the Pope's Easter mass but I forgot and went out to enjoy the now-free Nordic trails at Crosscut instead.

Ben and his little brother, Isaac, and I race around their parent's house like small children, trying to score the most eggs. Steve and Mary, their parents, watch and laugh as we pass by the more inconspicuous hiding spots.

Some traditions are broken and some traditions are held this Easter. We FaceTime Ben's grandparents and I call my own and then I call my mom and ask about their Easter cookies. "We have so many," I say. "To borrow from Paul, I will be rolling myself out of isolation."

April 13th, 2020

I loop around the trails at Crosscut and think about time.

Last night, Ben cupped a corner of our blanket and then pressed his finger down in it to make an indentation. "This," he said, "Is how time works. Time is a fabric and space is made of that fabric. This indent, that's like Earth. It pulls things in towards it and warps and speeds up time. The farther we move from the center here, the longer things take."

I keep looping and thinking about that fabric. Is it sentient? Does it know when to slow and speed up? "Time, these days, is meaningless," said Mara at breakfast.

I feel like it's elastic, stretching and snapping back each morning with the news on my computer. And still, this world keeps turning.

April 16th, 2020

Mara and Marikas' boredom has manifested in joint Tinder addictions. I watch them giggle side by side on the couch, their fingers fervently swiping their phone screens. Yesterday, they exhausted Tinder's supply of available Bozeman bachelors and are now choosing different cities and countries to virtually visit. Marika is currently in Revelstoke and Mara is in Australia.

"Listen to this guy's Bio!" Mara squeals. " 'I only date fucking interesting people, so you'd better be fucking interesting otherwise I'm not fucking interested.' " She proceeds to cackle and swipe, progressing to ogle the other available Australians.

"You should go to Djibouti," I suggest. "I want to see what Djibouti's Tinder scene is like."

"Let me finish here in Sydney and then we'll check it out."

As a dating app (or really, a hook-up app), Tinder's intended function is useless during quarantine but it serves as an entertaining substitute for people-watching. The seemingly endless catalogue of single humans is exciting and offers a strange glimpse of hope for the future.

"Ah! I wish I could actually go on a date with some of these guys!" exclaims Marika mid-swipe.

"You could try Bozeman Tinder again and arrange for a meeting, six feet apart," I suggest but she just laughs.

"No, Tinder is just for fun, not for real," she says.

April 18th, 2020

The stack of National Geographic magazines, 22 high, wobbles on the kitchen table. Mara and I sit surrounded by their scraps, remnants from our collage masterpieces. She holds hers up. An ostrich's body topped with a man's head looks gleefully skyward at a rocket ship and a parachuting penguin. The quote "Patterson: I like corn." is glued to the sky while a blobfish next to the words "fetish markets" lingers at the ostrich man's feet. I laugh until I cry.

April 20th, 2020

Today is Marika's 21st birthday and it could not be a more anticlimactic time to turn 21. We bike through The Hauf's drive-through, (drive-through alcohol?), so she can buy her first legal drink, a whiskey Coke. There's eleven of us on bikes, our best substitute for a socially-distanced birthday gathering. The bartender gives Marika a free birthday shot of Ouzo and we bike circles through the parking lot.

We return to the backyard where Wes stokes a fire in the fire pit and I gloriously present my triple-layer coconut cake on the picnic table. It's decadent mass boasts seven cups of sugar, four sticks of butter, and eight eggs in the cake, coconut pastry cream, and frosting combined. Ryan, Matias, Niko, and Cora all wander into the backyard, bringing our total to 15, and I thank myself for choosing to make such a behemoth of birthday cake.

This is the largest gathering I've been a part of in a while. Everyone tries to stand away from each other but the prolonged absence of human closeness and celebration magnetically

pulls our bodies closer together. I want to say something, point out that we're supposed to be standing farther apart, but the reality is that we are all so over worrying about a disease were quite sure none of us have that it would be wasted breath.

Marika downs another Smirnoff Ice and John plays "ROXANNE" by Arizona Zervas and we all dance as the stars begin to present themselves. The illusion of summertime lingers in the warm evening air and for a moment, we exist in an atmosphere of promising normalcy.

April 21st, 2020

I scurry through the aisles of Town and Country on a focused grocery-shopping mission. Despite my usual preference to languor in between the aisles, pondering possible recipes and lazily taking inventory of the shelves, I try to make this trip quick. I've forgotten my mask and feel like a social pariah, making my way bare-faced way through the store. A middle-aged woman gives me an annoyed glance over her floral-printed mask as I sneak past, trying not to breathe.

"I don't have it!" I want to proclaim, but I grab my kale and other essentials and hurriedly proceed to check-out.

April 23rd, 2020

The skiing conditions inside the Chamonix Couloir are variable at best but the sun caressing the steep Beartooth buttresses makes dodging melting waterfall chunks worth it. I join Ben at the mouth of the couloir after a particularly bullet-proof stretch of crust and we both plop down on our backsides.

"Well, I definitely feel my legs," he laughs. We look out across the East Rosebud valley. Melting patches of snow interspersed with persistent vegetation signify we are amidst the spring to summer transition.

"I'm kind of over skiing, I'd like the trails to dry out and start running big, long runs," I say and he nods. We both want the world to emerge from limbo.

August 25th, 2020

"I'm so impressed you're wearing a down coat," I say as I pass a woman in an Arc'Teryx as I run up the Bridger Ridge. It's 67 °F outside and I'm wearing a sports bra and shorts, sweaty, salty, and unbelieving that someone could be so covered up.

"I just came from San Diego," she smiles.

After my turnaround point, I pass her again and she says, "Hey, do you climb?" and I nod my head. "I just moved to Bozeman and I'm looking for places to climb. My name's Larissa." She reflexively holds her hand out for me to shake and I take a step backwards. We both get stuck in this awkward moment where the conventional interactions between humans fail.

"There's a bunch of climbing around Bozeman," I say to save us and give her a list of suggestions.

"Thanks!" she says and I keep running, feeling pity for her to have moved to a new place during a pandemic. What a difficult time to make friends.

April 30th, 2020

My email holds my virtual graduation announcements. I've been telling myself since graduation was officially canceled that it didn't matter, I would still get the degree, and that I wouldn't be sad. But when I open the Honors College email with the link to its virtual commencement ceremony, I feel a heavy disappointment settle over me. I think about how jarring the transitions have been this year, how many things we've said goodbye to without knowing at the time. The faces of my friends and classmates swim in my mind. *When was the last time I saw him? Where is she going after college? Will any of us ever be in the same place again?* These are typical graduation questions but they feel so much sharper and more painful without the consolation of a final celebration.

I think about how excited I'd been for my extended family to finally come see Bozeman and understand the life I've been living for the past for years. I wanted my 80-year-old grandparents to get to watch at least one grandchild graduate from college. I wanted to convince my cousin to come to MSU. I wanted closure. We all did.

Although I am not a religious person, a relic from my Catholic childhood surfaces and I remember *The Serenity Prayer*.

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

Graduation is one of those things I cannot change and I've learned not to waste my energy worrying about things not under my control. There is so much to be grateful for anyways – a quality education in a beautiful location and friends to last a lifetime, to name a few.

A Revenue Flats bonfire with lots of potential for social distancing sounds like a reasonable conclusion to this chapter.

Dear Prof D,

I just thought I'd write you a letter because

A) Letters and snail mail are so fun and I bought a bunch of stamps to support the USPS so I might as well use them

B) I was falling asleep trying to write my final paper for Digital Rhetorics (bleh) and so I decided to drink a cup of coffee. As someone who saves caffeine for only the most dire circumstances, I'm absolutely HIGH right now.

I could probably do anything right now - run a marathon, clean my yard and my neighbor's yard and maybe my neighbor's neighbor's yard, maybe even write this paper I'm supposed to be writing! But, ew, haha, no, I'd rather write you a letter. (Also, this serious buzz is probably a good indicator I should never try cocaine.)

I listened to Sam Kern's podcast the other day where he interviewed you about what we should do with our 20s. I was laying in my backyard as I do most days, gazing up at the infinite blue overhead, and wondering where I'll be going in my 20s. The MCAT was canceled and postponed indefinitely so my original plan to send my medical school application out in May and have a tidy gap year and then matriculate into school in August of 2021 may not happen. I still plan on sending my application in May, but it

won't have a test score and will be viewed as incomplete. I won't have the objective numbers to back up the person I am trying to say I am. It makes me wonder what med school admissions boards think about the Capital T Truth of a person.

Like the rest of the population, particularly my fellow 2020 graduates, the crumbling economy and disintegrating job prospects can make embarking on a new chapter in life feel a little understated and colored in degrees of uncertainty. My roommates all lost their summer internships and are scrambling for the highest-paying landscaping jobs they can find. My friend Joe is torn between working at a soap factory outside Missoula and being a sanitation technician, (a "trash man" as he lovingly calls it.) "At least I'd have job security!" he jokes. And he's right. We are all learning humility as our shiny new degrees get to firstst be tarnished working in the dirt.

In truth, I'm okay with^{it} and all my good friends are too because we've never believed we are above a profession. We're all lucky to be getting college educations; even if they don't translate immediately into a prestigious position, they translate into how we see~~see~~ the world, how we choose to vote, how we carry ourselves and navigate life in demanding times. And as an eternal optimist, I'm really not worried. I am healthy and currently financially okay and I'm surrounded by people I love. The world will keep turning and where we

are is where we're meant to be for right now. And we're all learning together and hopefully cultivating a global compassion. That's kind of what I hope for out of all of this: a deep appreciation for love and the humanity that connects all our fragile interactions to be recognized by the citizens of Earth. I think I might write a short story or something ruminating on all this. Title TBD, but I think "Love in the Time of Corona" might ~~have potential~~ have potential.

And so, how will I spend my 20s? I'm hopeful for a lot of things: hopeful one day I will don the white coat, hopeful I will see some more of the world and climb some big mountains (the physical and the metaphorical) and hopeful I will finally experience the sense of usefulness I've been seeking from my existence. I am a firm believer that everything in life matters and I want to know I did my best to live with meaning while I'm here. Will this all unfold in a neat and tidy timeline? No. Will I have successfully "transitioned" through my 20s upon my 30th birthday? Probably not. But I know that I'm excited for all of it, eyes wide open and curious.

I hope that you are well and have progressed from shuffling to comfortably walking. The sunshine demands frequent walks these days.

All my best, Mallie

A Letter to You Who Looks in the Archives

Dear Posterity,

I hope that wherever, or really *whenever*, you are now that you are living “normally.” Normalcy, that glorious, indefinable state, is precious. Living in the time of COVID-19 taught me to listen to the clichés and appreciate the little things. There is beauty in the ordinary.

Realize that life as you know it can change any second. You do not deserve normalcy, it is not your right. You are not safe from earth-shattering change.

Love others strongly and let them know you love them. Appreciate each other’s company and every moment you have together, even when you’re sitting side-by-side sweating over a chemistry exam or commiserating over your work-filled weekends or something even less glamorous. It’s that human connection that’s important.

To embrace another cliché, I’ll leave you with a quote from Einstein:

“A human being is part of a whole, called by us the ‘Universe’ —a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

A Small Collection of Haikus:

Marika:

8 AM show time
the cinema in my room
popcorn on the house

JV:

frantic grocery time
masks, gloves, and quickened paces
don't let the bug bite

Tessa:

streets once bustling
now empty except the trash
house of the hermit

Kirk Branch:

"going viral sucked,
even metaphorically,"
he said through his mask

Ben:

the world is backwards
topsy-turvy, upside down
the sun still rises

Me:

concluding college
no pomp due to circumstance
release the balloons