

9-16-2021

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Recommended Citation

Bedford, Melissa J. and Shaffer, Shelly, "Unprecedented: Collected Poems in Two Voices" (2021). *Life During COVID: Preserving Personal Pandemic Stories*. 27.
<https://dc.ewu.edu/covid/27>

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Unprecedented: Collected Poems in Two Voices

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Coronavirus disease 2019 - COVID-19 - 2019-nCoV acute respiratory disease - Novel coronavirus pneumonia - Severe pneumonia with novel pathogen - all names for a disease that has stopped the world from turning. Halted economies. Halted schools. Halted graduation, marriages, vacations, conferences. Halted plans for the future.

Case counts. Death counts. Climbing statistics. Growing numbers of people infected - people fatally infected - with a disease that has a name but not a cure.

Families devastated. Loved ones not able to say goodbye.

Daily updates. Obsessed with knowing. Not sure if I know anything at all. Social distancing. Six feet apart. Feels like a thousand miles. A thousand days stretch before me. Before I will be able to connect again.

Re-open businesses? Keep them closed? Go out? Stay at home? Wear a mask? Be afraid. Be brave. Mixed messages on media outlets. Not sure who to believe. Not wanting a resurgence. Knowing nothing.

Alone.

Together.

Apart.

#AloneTogether is an oxymoron.

We cannot be together if we are alone. We cannot simulate the same feelings of camaraderie using Zoom. We are alone. We are not together. Even in families where several people are quarantined under the same roof: four in my house. The teenager retreats to his room. Dad finds solace in the basement - his "man cave" putting in extra

duty. My college student struggles to juggle online classes and work. Worried. About her own health. About money. About passing. About bringing the virus home.

Too busy to be "together." I work.

Lonely. Even in a crowded house. Full of people, animals.

Thinking quarantine would create more time with family. But. Less time - and more guilt.

Guilt for the messy house. Guilt over my lack of motivation, my lack of time. Disappointed that my motivation to exercise, reconnect, read, write... has all fizzled.

Burnt out. That's what I feel. All day. Every day. Even when I take time to practice self care, I return to my work still feeling burnt out. My fuse continues to disintegrate no matter when I try to bring it back. Will this vicious cycle ever end? Even now, all I feel is burnt out.

Is your heart racing? Yup. Do you find it hard to breathe? Yes. Are you lightheaded? I am. You might be showing symptoms of COVID-19. Nope, not this time. What I'm showing symptoms of is...

A PANIC ATTACK!

I shouldn't joke about panic attacks, because there's nothing funny about them. They suck!

People say, "Well, just think happy thoughts," or "Try to get your mind off things," or "Take a break." I know they mean well, but if I had to assume, I'd say these people have never truly had a panic attack.

Laying in bed in a dark room, trying to regulate your breathing, only to have your heart start racing again because you thought of yet another thing to add to your "To Do" list - yeah, that's been my life.

Sitting down at the computer with every intention to be productive, but the first thing you encounter is a message from a student asking how they're supposed to access the book you assigned at the beginning of the quarter when it's now week eight of class - queue the hyperventilating.

I try not to medicate all the time when things like this happen, but sometimes I have no choice.

Speaking of which, time to take another.

Overwhelmed with my to do list. Work never ends. No work/life balance. Can I skip meetings? Turn off my camera and mic on a conference call so I can work on other tasks? Hard to multi-task - to prioritize - to deal with it all. No escape now. But grateful to be working. To have a job.

Why do some people think that working from home means not working? Or easier work?

What is the perception of people outside academia about the work we do? Why am I asked questions in a family chat such as: How many people actually go to work every day? Not working from home, but actually go to their job every day? Why am I made to feel disrespected because the work I do from home isn't as meaningful to outsiders as actually driving to an office?

I work everyday. And I work longer hours than when I actually went into the office. So it makes no difference. So I don't leave my house... I'm working twice as hard right now than I did before.

Staying at home doesn't mean that it's easier. At least not for me.

So the question for me is who would rather go back to work than stay at home? Because at least if I was back to work, I would leave at 4 p.m. and work would stay at work. But that's not what's happening right now. Right now, I have a meeting at 8 a.m. every single day, and half the time, I don't eat until after 3 p.m. because I'm in straight meetings the whole entire day. And sometimes it's 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. and I'm still working. Then my husband goes to bed, and I work two more hours. So it's like I'm working all my waking hours. And, that's not how it was before.

And I'm still never done.

And there's nothing worse than being home all day and not even really being able to see your husband. So that's my rant.

Everyone wants to feel appreciated; knowing that what they have done meant something to someone else, so much so that that other person took the time to share their gratitude. I continue to share my appreciation with my students for their hard work and patience during these uncertain times. But what about me? Do they appreciate my hard work and patience? Do they truly understand all the time and effort that goes on behind the scenes to ensure that their online learning is the best it can be? I don't think they do. Is there just so much going on that they don't have time to share their appreciation? Is it a generation thing, where the memes on Millennials and Gen Z-ers are accurate? Is it that they just don't care?

It wasn't until all this that I realized how significant *routines* are in my life.

My commuting routine: the 40+ minutes I get to drive to and from work. This is when I get to visualize my day as I drive to campus. Remember what meetings I have for the day. Think about what materials I need for class. All the while listening to whatever musical genre I'm feeling that day. Depending on the time of year, sometimes I drive when it's still dark and other times I get to see a beautiful sunrise. I do the drive all over again at the end of the school day in the opposite direction. This is when I process and reflect on the day's events. Think about what I have planned for tomorrow. Most days this is when I call my dad to just chat and talk about our lives 700+ miles apart. I cherish this drive time and long forward to its return.

My teaching routine: the 110+ minutes of face-to-face classes. Rounding up the materials I need for the day's lesson is filled with excitement as I think about the fun strategies I get to share with my students. I can't wait to model practices that they will, hopefully, one day use in their future classrooms. While the events in the classroom vary day-to-day, based on student background knowledge and engagement, there is still the consistency in modeling for and engaging students with hands-on learning. Now the modeling is done through one-sided videos, engaging students as best I can while teaching to an empty room, or on some occasions my dog. I'm not having to quickly adapt the lesson as needed or scramble for materials because I left the box of scissors up in my office. The smiles, the laughter, the occasional eye rolls...they're all missing. Hopefully one day they will come back.

My social routine: the various minutes and hours I spend with friends. On campus, it's a pop of the head into a colleague's office to ask, "Did you bring lunch today?" or, "Want to get out of the office for a bit and grab a cup of coffee?" On the weekends, it's sending a text asking who wants to go to the brewery for a tasty pint or shooting off a mass invite for a last-minute barbecue. What we're left with now are virtual dates. It's just not the same. But it's certainly better than nothing. So bring on the Thursday virtual lunch dates; even though my head will stay in my own home office, at least we'll still get to see each other stuff food in our yaps. Let's hope that these friends will still be around when we can finally be back on campus and we can enjoy a walk to grab food at the student union.

Thirteen weeks of online teaching. Online meetings. Online advising. Business as usual.

March 16, 2020. No cases on campus. Concerns. Safety. Caution. Precautions taken. Forego in-person instruction. Send students home, if possible. No good-byes. Just gone.

March 25, 2020. Proclamation 20-25. Governor Inslee orders Washington State closed. Stay at home. Stay healthy. Cease gathering. Don't leave your house. Effective immediately. Nonessential - work from home. Empty offices across campus. Empty classrooms.

April 6, 2020. Start of the university spring quarter has been postponed. One week to plan. One week to move online. No warning. Not enough time. Unprepared. Students and faculty stressed. Frantic start to an unprecedented quarter.

April 13, 2020. Quarter starts. New students. New courses. 10 weeks instead of the usual 11. Confident we can make it work. Confident we can figure it out. Module 1.

April 20. Module 2... April 27. Module 3. Losing confidence. Feeling exhausted. Trying to be productive. A little success. A little failure. A lot of learning. A lot of compassion, understanding, graciousness.

April 30. Too fast. Too much. .. too many hours online, too many classes, too many assignments. Fatigue for both students and faculty. Slow down - Cut down. Only Essential lessons and Essential content.

I swear, online teaching is 10 times more work than teaching in person.

Planning.

Finding, downloading, scanning, and uploading the readings.

Locating and watching videos to find the most worthwhile ones. (Don't forget the embedding code!)

Preparing the materials: online quizzes, templates, graphic organizers...

Putting together the lecture presentation.

Then *recording* the lecture voiceover.

Editing the recording because of a flubbed explanation (I've given up on editing out the dog's squeaky toys).

Organizing the online module so it's easy for students to manage.
Making sure due dates are correct in the system.
Communicating predominantly through writing (I should create a shortcut to copy/paste, "I hope that makes sense").
Meeting virtually and holding virtual office hours.
Don't even ask about grading.

Granted these are things we do in a normal semester, but it sure as heck feels like 10 times more work. Maybe I should have majored in math.

Coronavirus impacting coursework, education, ability to study, to concentrate, to succeed. Students - checked out, missing work, not responding to emails or phone calls. I worry about their health, their families, their school work, their lives. I take desperate steps. Breaking quarantine to check on a Veteran, an education student, who disappeared. Driving to his house. Social distancing. Relieved he was safe. But, I discovered he suffered from panic attacks, PTSD., couldn't complete the quarter. Reached out to him, and I offered a solution: start over in the fall., withdraw from classes.

Week after week. Video after video. Module after module. More exhausted. Less time. Already June 1. 31 days in May. Gone. How is it that time flew by in teaching, planning, grading? But in quarantine, time crawls?

June 12, 2020. Times up! End of the spring quarter. Finals. Out of time. No more videos, teaching, or grading. I hope my students learned. I hope it wasn't a wasted effort - that it was all worth it.

Now, can I catch my breath?

Finishing the quarter with what small pieces of sanity I have left, I can't help but think about the next quarter. What do I need to include to make sure my students are still receiving a proper education to prepare them for their future careers? What do I need to change to make sure both my students and myself are able to manage all life has in store? Will the fall be just more of the same? Or will luck be on our side and we can get back to school like before? What's that sound? Is that a school bell? Oh wait...that's just my imagination.

Teachers and students. Students and teachers. This has been a main focus for many during the COVID quarter.

Hold on though. There are others we are forgetting. What about our staff? The people who help faculty and students function on a daily basis. Has anyone thought of them?

I can tell you who has thought about them.

Administration.

As higher education heads into one of the most unprecedented times in its history, many institutions are facing a -- to use the word-of-the-day -- DIRE situation. What to do about the budget? Well, it looks like one of the solutions is to cut down the staff. Cut down on the people who make everything run. Cut down the colleagues who ensure that we can teach and our students can learn. Cut, cut, cut.

I know it's easier for me to criticize these decisions, because I am not in Admin's position (nor do I want to be).

I wish I had the solution. I really do.

Hope.

How do we remain hopeful when so much is going on outside our windows, beyond our doors, on the computer, on the news, on our minds? What does hope look like?

Hope that we don't return to business-as-usual. That we learn from this historic event and change the narrative.

Hope that we learn from this. That we slow down and pay attention to those around us. That we enjoy our time together and value it. That we become stronger.

Hope that we appreciate our surroundings. The local bookstore. The coffee shop on the corner. The walking trail by the river. The preserved nature site. The animals. The wind. The colors. The sky. The world we live in.

Hope that people don't return to their busyness. Don't return to their selfishness. Don't continue to ignore or forget what's important.

Hope that people in the U.S. see that education is not appreciated or valued in this country. Parents are recognizing the value of K-12 teachers as they attempt to “teach” their children at home. Families are longing to send off their college students; parents to become empty nesters once again and students to learn how to become an adult. Higher education is taking a hit. People want to reap the benefits, but not take responsibility to support it.

Hope that our colleagues are still there when we return. That our students come back to school. That our university hasn't suffered irreparable financial damage.

Hope that we recognize the inequalities that exist among our students. That not all students have the same access to education. Access to technology. Access to broadband. Access to basic supplies. Access to learn.

Hope that we continue to focus on social justice in our work. That we aren't consumed with worry about our jobs or pressure from outside to teach more, do more. That we are given time to process this event and figure out a better way. Focus on supporting other people and not only ourselves. That we are able to use our privilege to help.

Hope that our nation, our families, our relationships, our school system, our economy, our trust, our society... are not destroyed.

How do we establish a community that supports hope? How can we move beyond the trauma into a stronger future? How do we move on after losing family, friends, and colleagues? How do we recover? How will our lives be different now? How do we move on when we don't know the answers?

Hope.