

Name for posting: Katherine Fujimoto-Young

Additional information: A person like you, or her, or him, or they... just trying to find my purpose and fulfill my duties with passion and love.

Your experience during COVID-19:

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5th Annual BBCC Student Writing Contest

2019-2020

Non-Fiction Category

First Place Winning Piece

Written in the Spring of 2020

by Katherine Fujimoto-Young

Dedicated to those who lost a part of themselves in the pandemic...

May you take what you were given and build a life that you smile about.

Dear Anyone Who Will Read This,

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

These last few months have been loooooooooong.

I don't know who it was rougher on... me or her? Probably her. Sure, my average daily usage has gone up from three hours to six since this all has started, and she rarely lets me recharge to my full capacity. But she... her soul was breaking. Her spirit was lost.

If I really think about it, this all started way before the COVID-19 took its hold on the world. She likes to think she's psychic. Sometimes, even I must admit, she really does seem to be. She'll have dreams that come true or will talk about a hypothetical situation that happens in the days to follow. Usually, I could chalk it up to crazy coincidences. However, what I am about to reveal next, and I am not – in fact, I do not possess the capabilities to do this in the first place – lying, is something that I cannot just sweep under the carpet with all the other coincidences.

She may not remember, and her friends that were with her that night may not remember, but deep into a late-night conversation that occurred about a year ago, she had said that the world was due for a plague.

With a blank face and a monotone voice, she stared off into the ceiling and continued. "The world hasn't had one in years. It will come soon."

One of the guys looked at her, spooked. "That's creepy. It's like you just relayed a message from a higher power."

"Yeah, like she was delivering a prophecy." another added, laughing a little.

Kailee's eyes widened; she didn't mean to get dark on everybody. "Sorry, I don't even know where that came from." she laughed along.

No one took it seriously, not even her. Why should they? Why should she? Sometimes she thought she could be a psychic. But when it came down to it, she figured they were either crazy coincidences, like I did, or just good guesses. She was not a psychic. Besides, they were simply talking theories about the apocalypse anyways.

But maybe, even then, she knew. Maybe she really is a psychic after all. Maybe that's why she was sick, sick as a premonition.

That's where this story begins.

She was sick.

She caught a cold – at least, that's what she thinks she had since she couldn't go to the doctors – in the beginning of February. She had classes, she had work, and it may not seem like a lot, but it consumed her. In the two years she'd be at Big Bend Community College, Winter

2020 would be her hardest. She couldn't just stop her studies and making money. She worked through being sick.

It was already March when she realized that she had been sick for a month. Having already worked so much that she ran out of work-study money, she decided to take a week off. She needed to let her body rest. She stayed home and was in bed most of the time, eating food, sleeping, and doing her class work online. She was a lot better by the next week and took things lightly. She stayed home most days, only leaving the house to attend her classes that took place twice a week. If she knew that it was going to be her last week of instruction, she would've just push through being sick and spent most of her time on campus.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

The call that was made on Friday, March 13th, shook her whole community. It was a decision that affected the athletic department, and that was her family. If I remember right, the baseball team was the first to know. That weekend was rough for all of them. She watched them close people off to process all of what the season getting cancelled meant. It took a whole weekend and it pinched at her heart. Those boys just... fell apart. The last year and a half that she has known them, they were these strong, funny, friendly, goofy, polite, dorky, smiley, bubbly bunch of boys. After that Friday, they transformed into this sad, heartbroken, bitter group of men.

As for the softball girls, two of whom she lived with, they didn't get the definite call until Monday, the 16th. They were numb that whole weekend before, trying to ignore the inevitable decision that was being dragged out. But when Monday came, they fell apart too. For Kailee, she saw that the boys were slowly coming to acceptance. They were setting dates to move back home, they were talking about what they were doing next year, they were ready to put this year in a box and come back to start all over again in the Fall because they were simply not done with Big Bend. They weren't ready to let go. And as the boys were doing this, Kailee watched the softball team go through what the baseball team went through. She watched her roommates crash, and there was nothing she, or anyone else, could do about it.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

She went to school that day. It was the last day of instruction for the quarter instead of the 18th. She went to her classes, she went to work, she put all her ducks in a row. And then she lost it on her coach. She told him everything. Her sadness, her frustration, her confusion. She hadn't realized what this meant for volleyball until that moment. Unlike her friends that participated in Spring sports, Kailee's season ended back in November. However, she didn't think that was going to be the last time she was going to compete alongside her teammates. She had been looking forward to Spring Ball since Fall and now she wasn't going to have that either. As she left campus that day, like grass in the wind, she slowly drifted away from where she belonged. She lost a part of herself.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

The days to follow took a huge toll on her emotional level. She carried me everywhere, my camera app on standby, rushing to capture as much memories as she could before people left. Pictures were taken, videos were recorded, most of them blurry like her vision as she cried, and if you knew her, she was not a crier. But she hated goodbyes. She hated goodbyes even more when she wasn't sure she'd see the other person again. She had a friend, Mia, moving on to Texas, for crying out loud! Though she was happy for Mia and proud that, not only an athlete from Big Bend was going on to play D1, but another athlete from Hawai'i, she was still sad by the distance that would soon separate them.

"We should be saying our goodbyes with our feet in the sand, under the stars, around a fire, while singing sad songs." she tweeted on one of those nights, tear drops running down my screen leaving salty smears when she wiped my face against her sweater.

In those few days, I don't think she ever slept. She was either too busy or too sad to. I remember being jostled around a lot, pinging off cell towers all over Moses Lake. We bounced around from place to place, spending time with her friends and slowly saying goodbye as they started disappearing. Every day, more people left. She didn't even get to say goodbye to all of them because things were happening so fast.

She tried to remember. She tried to remember what their answers were when she asked, 'What are you doing next year?' However, with answers from forty different people, she couldn't remember all of them. She was sure most of them were coming back, due to still having eligibility. And found solace in that. She wouldn't be in Moses Lake next year, but Cheney was less than two hours away. She'd see them again.

If only she knew... if only they knew!

Not everyone could be kept. Some of them would be forced to move on. Some of them said goodbye thinking that they'd see each other again in a few months when that now was no longer the case. And then, to make it all worse, her roommates left.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

She was alone in their house – well, she had her brother, but he hardly counts – for about a month. Left to her own emotions, mental issues, and physical decline. She finished up her Winter classes and spent Spring Break being numb. Sure, she could have gone back home to Hawai'i. But you don't know. You don't know about the conversations I overhear and the texts that I oversee. Going back home would've been worse. It would've been claustrophobic, suffocating.

Besides, she knew if she went back home, she wouldn't be able to come back to Washington until Easter Washington University started up their classes in the Fall and she was nowhere near being done with Moses Lake. Yes, Moses Lake is a small, dry, flat, nothing-to-do

town. But it did have its hidden gems and it had amazing people. Though most were gone, even the few made it worth the while to stay.

So, she did. She stayed.

She waited a month until her roommates would start coming back. Initially, Kailee and her brother fell into this routine. They'd wake up, make breakfast, and watch morning cartoons. They'd do class work once Spring quarter started up. They'd make lunch and, afterwards, they'd finish their homework. And then, while her brother would play games, she'd watch TV or workout. Exercising helped her a lot... I should suggest to her that she start doing it again.

Anyways, I digress... where was I? Oh, yes! Okay, so after working out and taking a shower, dinner would be made, and they'd watch a movie after having argued for about an hour on what they would watch. Once the movie finished, they retreated to their rooms and Kailee would just rotate between the social networking apps until I ran out of battery power, her eyes would sting from looking at my bright face in the dark, or until she realizes that she's having to fight really hard to keep her eyelids open.

The routine got old though. She got bored. She didn't know what to do. There was this huge pause on her life and she just felt like she had to pause too. Bad move, though. Her thoughts were always the loudest in the dark...

She got sad. I can't even begin to tell you how long she spent going through pictures and watching videos. She made TikToks and iMovie videos with the apps that I have downloaded to compact all the memories she made at Big Bend. It was honestly pathetic. Someone really needed to get this girl out of the house! It was a relief when the first of her roommates showed back up. She was finally getting what she needed, but I would be lying – and, like I said before, I can't lie -- if I said that I didn't need it too! I know I'm supposed to be water resistant, but I don't think I could take anymore of her drool or tears.

The 'Stay at Home' order had been extended, but she didn't mind much. With her friends coming back, she wouldn't be so sad and bored anymore. Driving to Spokane to pick up her roommate at the airport must've been the fastest two hour drive she had ever done. A little bit of life was given back to her. She had fixed up her room, changed her bed sheets, caught up with her homework, watered the lawn, done the dishes, taken out the trash, cleaned the bathroom, swept and mopped the floors, all in preparation for the arrival of her roommate. She was turning over a new page. She was going to be better now.

I wish I could've told her that it doesn't work like that. Maybe she would've been prepared.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

Halle came back on the 20th and Andi came back on the first of May. The band was getting back together. I wish I could tell you that things went uphill from here... but life is never

always on an incline. It's a rollercoaster filled with its ups and downs. Hopefully, she realizes soon that she should just enjoy the ride because once it's done... it's done. No one gets another chance to ride the rollercoaster called Life.

Their other roommate, Hera, had practically moved out. Hera took her cat, most of her things, and barely chucked up the deuces before pulling off their street with plans on attending WSU next year. They didn't see it coming. And let me tell you, if anyone here knows anything, it's me! And all I can say – without throwing people under the bus – is that they were not happy. They had plans. They had at least two months left with each other and it just felt like they were being... bailed on. A huge slap in the face is what it was, and I understand this. Kailee often forgets about me now that her friends are back.

"Where's my phone?" she'll ask.

"I'm right here where you left me for the past three hours!" I would yell out loud if I could.

Waiting for her to check the only three places she ever leaves me – which is on her bed, on the coffee table, or on the kitchen counter – and finding me at the last one she checks is, honestly, the most disrespectful and taunting thing I could ever experience. Why does she call out for me when she knows I cannot answer?! And yet, I am still loyal and here, writing out her story, wishing her the best in life.

And I guess that includes not going to Eastern with her best friend anymore. Her and Andi were roommates their Freshmen year. And they went through a lot together. They were making plans on going to Eastern next year. It was going to be fun. And then Andi had to break the news that she'd be going to PSU. It's a better decision for Andi, financially, being from Oregon and all. Luckily, Kailee didn't take it too hard... still being numb towards anything involving the future. She was so numb that she was ignoring her own future! Her realistic future. She was still holding onto this fantasy about next year, a fantasy she had formed ever since Halle had decided that she was going to stay at Big Bend for another year instead of going to UVU.

She had hopes that Eastern would put their classes online. "Big Bend is doing it for the Fall, why wouldn't Eastern?"

She was going to stay in Moses Lake, live in the same house with Halle and a few other softball players, be there for the volleyball season, see her friends again, and then get the goodbye she wanted. She wanted to do it the right way, without rushing. And living in Moses Lake would be a lot cheaper than Cheney.

But it was just too perfect. She should have known. Nothing ever too perfect happens. She wasn't a stranger to unfairness. In all actuality, they were good acquaintances and Kailee should have known.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

Spring started to come around. The temperature was finally getting up into the high seventies, which brought on another bout of sadness upon Kailee. She'd hear a song that reminded her of her friends or a song that symbolized last Spring. She'd be reminded of all that could've been and wouldn't be.

"I just feel like I'm leaving behind a lot more in Moses than I should be. Like if things went as planned, then it'd just be volleyball. But now it feels like I'm leaving behind a whole lot of friends, an incomplete year at Big Bend, and missing a huge chunk of memories that should've been made." Kailee had quickly texted Mia after passing by the lake on a sunny day and realizing that the people she was excited to go to the lake with isn't even in Moses Lake anymore. And if you think that's sad, you do not want to see her Twitter!

Kailee knows she's not the only one going through this. She's not ignorant enough to think 'Woe is me, and no one understands!' And she's aware that there are others out there in worse situations than she ever could be. However, I'm the one telling this story and she's my owner. I cannot provide any insight on anyone else's life but hers so... this is what you'll have to deal with.

...I think I've picked up on her tendencies.

Every time I try to talk about her future I go off on a tangent and I blame Kailee's awful habits. She's getting better, though, I promise.

It took her a while to find herself again and, even then, she's barely scratched the surface. She's slowly realizing that she needs to be preparing. Eastern hasn't decided yet. They're ready for in-class instruction but are preparing for online in the Fall. But they won't know for sure until the end of May, or even June. Which puts Kailee on this torturing waiting period. Should she just go home? Will she be able to stay in Moses Lake? Should she be looking at places for rent in Cheney and new roommates to go with it? She hasn't paid her enrollment fee, she hasn't registered for classes, and she hasn't completed her Financial Aid information with Eastern... but at least she's finally back on track and heading in that direction.

She's found a reasonable priced apartment. A perfect one. Beautiful set up, spacious design, she'll have her own bedroom, and it's in walking distance of the campus! She's found potential roommates, one being a good friend from Big Bend. She's now, more and more, finding herself... excited about new adventures in a new place with new people.

And I couldn't be anymore happier for her. Change is good. Coming to terms with everything that's been happening, accepting this obstacle and adjusting her course was hard for her... oddly enough. Usually she's very fluid with these kinds of things. She's usually very adaptable. Something about those goodbyes... struck her deep.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

She once tweeted,

“smh... this spring was gonna be somethin else.
the build up was insane.
but the base never dropped.”

She was reflecting, once again, on what could've been. She was making plans for Spring 2020 since the last one. That's where the music reference comes in regarding the buildup and the bass. It was going to be huge. The longest going-away/graduation celebration that would take place for the athletic department at Big Bend. It was going to be the perfect conclusion for her, and all her other friends and their time spent at Big Bend. Baseball and softball seasons were going to be intense. She'd be working in the concession behind home plate, catching some sun, cheering on her friends, complaining about ump calls, watching her friends at NWACs, and then closing it up with going to the Dunes and having graduation. But the 'base', implied to be the bass in music, refers to the bases on the diamond that were never put in for the seasons. And then there's that double meaning in the first line. Because... this Spring was something else, wasn't it?

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua.

There's this Hawaiian proverb that she came into contact with pretty recently and it really resonated with her. Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua. When translated it means, "When the sky weeps, the earth lives." For Hawaiians it is much more than the cycle between heaven and earth. Hawaiians see rain as a blessing, that when it falls, it allows the land to thrive. And the land is their grandmother and that when she is healthy, they will be provided for. They believe that water is not simply water, but the water of life and we are connected to it.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua. She understands what it means to the Hawaiians, what it means to her. It's a beautiful concept. However, looking at the translation, it provides another interpretation for Kailee to take in and live by.

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua... everything happens for a reason.

It is up to us to decide what we want to do with what is placed before us. We can drown in the water that weeps from the skies, or we can do our best with what is laid out before us to create the lives we want for ourselves.

COVID-19 came in and swept across the globe, upturning everyone's lives. This era has been a struggle for many. But as someone once said, there's so much more to life. There's so much more to life outside of this pandemic. The mistake we make is when we let it control us. Her coach would often tell her and the team, 'Control what you can control.'

And control what she can control she shall. The only thing she can control is herself. She can control what she does, how she does it, the reasons behind it, and how she reacts to outside forces. So, for now, she'll focus on herself. She'll focus on finishing her classes. She'll

focus on finishing the Eastern process. She'll focus on what she'll be doing in the Fall. She'll focus on making the best out of the rest of her time in Moses Lake. She'll focus on spending time with the people that are still there. She'll focus on doing what she can and worry less about what she can't. And by the end of it all, she should be okay. As should everyone else...

Uwe ka lani, ola ka honua...

everything happens for a reason.

Truly Not Yours but Kailee's,

The Left Behind