



THE FRIENDLY SPIKE THEATRE  
PRESENTS

# POEMDEMIC!

A COLLECTION OF POEMS AND MUSINGS  
INSPIRED BY THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE  
COVID 19 PANDEMIC OF 2020/2021



Published by the Secret Handshake 2022

POEMDEMIC! is a project of The Friendly  
Spike Theatre Band, published by Secret  
Handshake Books.

Learn more at [friendlyspike.org](http://friendlyspike.org) and  
visit [thesecrethandshake.ca](http://thesecrethandshake.ca)

*“Poetry is to fall in love with the world in spite of history.”*

- Derek Walcott 1992

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## POEMDEMIC! Creative Team

Project Manager: Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse

Editor: Honey Novick

Design/Layout Artist: Richard Paul

Cover illustration: bill bissett

# POEMDEMIC! INTRODUCTION



Honey Novick September, 2021 Toronto On

The Ides of March 2020. Ides, brutal to Caesar and Ides 2020, brutal to the world as I knew it. On Friday, March 19, 2020, in the morning, my calendar was full to October, by that evening, all my appointments were gone. It was like losing a part of my identity and then being forced to become flexible in this, my, new world order. At first, I didn't think I could do it and then I knew that if I didn't learn to forebear, I would completely lose myself.

That spring, 2020, the great Flavia Cosma, poet, artist, photographer and director of the International Festival of Writers and Artists in Val David, Quebec invited me to be a guest feature on zoom. As such, I needed to present a "theme". Thus, the portemanteau "poemdemic" was created and it seemed apt. Through poetry I could survive the pandemic. I believed it then and I believe it now. When reporting to Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse, she remembered the invented word "poemdemic". A project for the Friendly Spike Theatre Band was creatively born.

Creativity, by its very nature, is being flexible and making room for development, using all our senses. We must pay attention to the visible and the invisible – energy lives all around and inside and upside and through and through. There is give and take and recognition in offering and accepting. Nothing is mutually exclusive. Creativity lives and guides and teaches and hurts and cultivates. We are the canvass, the baton, the colours, the saga, each and all things.

When I open myself to me, I reveal a wealth that is private, symbiotic and I can choose to honour that by offering myself to you or keeping myself for me. Creativity is the larder that anyone can access, if we want to.

Forearmed with this philosophy and with the brilliance of Ruth Ruth's vision, we created a project that many people could join and feel a part of something other than despair. bill bissett came on board with his blessings and encouragement that the Secret Handshake would publish this book.

I was invited to be the editor even though I have a contribution called, "I'm A Frayed Knot" which could also sound like "I'm afraid, not".

Fortified by this call to arms (with pens and devises), we wrote and spoke and shared ideas and hopes and eventually came up with a great endeavour called "POEMDEMIC!".

Thank you to everyone who participated in whatever way you could. You are all invaluable to me. Thank you to the venerable Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse. Profound love and appreciation to bill bissett for EVERYTHING (too numerous to mention). A particular heartfelt thank you and deep gratitude to Richard Paul, the hard-working, insightful, inventive Richard Paul, layout artist extraordinaire. Couldn't have done it without you.

*-Honey Novick*

# POEMDEMIC! FOREWORD

**bill bissett**  
Sept 11, 2021 Mattawa, On

4word

poemdemic ths brilliyant colleksyun  
uv genius pomes takes us  
on a journee uv lite thru ths time uv  
darkness poetree langwage  
art can b th stedee candul in th dark-  
ning cave we sumtimes find  
ourselvs in that along with all th  
courageous health care workrs  
illumines th sick n deth toll metriks  
we find oursels trying 2 survive  
n ovrcum th various strugguls  
against th manee ignorances poem  
demic is a wundrful tool 4 keeping  
going thru ths terriblee diffikult  
time th secret handshake is sew hap-  
pee 2 b part uv th awsum  
adventur uv ths beautiful book put  
2gethr with care nd love

-bill bissett

1

## POEMDEMIC: An Acrostic

**Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse,**  
January 4th, 2021 Toronto On

**P**ersonally, i feel excluded .. i would have prefered to have  
stayed at my job as a front line worker rather than quarantined  
at home because of a faulty immune system..

**O**n the other hand, however, i can make the most of my lot..

**E**ngaging with others in artistic persuits through virtual  
means is one way of getting through the day..

**M**usings about these unique times helps write the story..

**D**elivering the words to readers provides collective meaning..

**E**nergizing each other, possibly..

**M**aking a difference..

**I**nterestingly, I don't feel excluded anymore..

**C**hances are you don't either.

## 2

## Starfish

by Helen Posno,  
Sometime in 2020, Toronto, On

' STARFISH -rolling heedlessly  
Bereft among the  
Waves upon this ocean floor -to  
Wail and wait for sorrowing pandemic  
Lockdowns to take their  
Toll: not just in all these human lives  
passing with this bleak  
Virus - but in people-s fear that  
Someday will be lost to them as they  
Continue this hard stumbling on such  
Strangely tidal paths; this fishing star  
Reaches throughout our  
Dreams - beyond all physical  
Discerning - extending  
Faith.'



MASK JOCKEY.

Helen Posno 2020

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## REFUSE

Mark Guttridge  
summer 2020, Toronto On

Slowly, sinuously, I slither down the darkened hallway

Assimilating the shadows, that dance around me,

Emanating from a broken ceiling light.

I hone my hearing to its heightened apex,

Becoming alert for any crumb of sound.

I inhale the bitter, acrid taste of  
immanent concern.

Rationale has decided to flee.

Nowhere to be found.

The spectre of a baneful atmosphere  
becomes a ravenous hound.

I grimly gather my garbage  
And release it down the never ending chute  
of oblivion.

I scurry back home  
I have won  
Mission accomplished.

**HOORAH!**

4

## Sleep half the Day

Sarah Wells  
April 28, 2020, Toronto On

I cannot sit and relax  
Feeling uncomfortable, not at peace

Sleep half the day  
Makes time slip away  
Because  
I want to ungrasp  
and be freed from my mind

Feeling unusual, not myself  
Distant from reality  
Voices of imposters  
Building a business of lies in my mind  
I need wind to swift through my ears  
I need wind to sweep through my ears  
I wont wake until the smoke is lifted from my lungs

I feel tight and stricken  
My freedom has been taken with this pandemic  
This coronavirus plague

Meantime,  
I will hold on tight to the light I see  
As I grip into the pillow and  
wait to wake



allan gardens w. bill bissett  
n my brother jesse

simon-cameron  
1/13/2021, Toronto On

th turtlez uv allan gardens r kinder  
than all uv us  
they don't hav 2 live  
or breeth,, or love  
or laugh,, or dreem  
with masks on...

we all look stranger than th plantz  
with our masks on  
but th plantz don't mind  
nor do th turtlez

th turtlez tell funny jokes  
2 each other when no one is looking  
can u heer them laughing???  
can u heer them dreemin???

A Frayed Knot

Honey Novick  
January 16, 2021, Toronto On

I am afraid, not  
I am a frayed knot  
unravelling, revealing  
vulnerabilities once hidden  
now shared with almost no one

threads entwined, braided, knitted  
transforming communities of singing life choirs  
they now mesh with the enticing winds and roaring tides

this is a-lone-ness language, needing to be heard  
relearned ex-harmony, ex-vocabilities, redefined

"Adapt or Die" is the new motto  
"Adapt and Live" is the new mantra  
INNOVATE, regurgitate, realign, be grateful

Once in a land far away the chickadee and nuthatch  
fought for territory,  
once in a land faraway I dared hug you  
now in this land inhabited by an invisible death scourge  
I keep my distance, I keep my counsel  
I remember my dreams

I am a frayed knot  
looking to once again bind  
all that I love

Patience, they tell me is the key  
the Key of Patience  
the knot dangling from a new music



Lilita Tannis  
June 2020 Toronto On



the lilac, the sun  
and the city morgue bursting  
on the same Monday

bring my provisions  
an amulet  
soap

the apple blossoms, a wine bottle  
my Will undressed  
in the kinky afternoon

bring me clean surfaces  
a butter tart  
bone soup

Black men, white women  
Indigenous and brown  
pronounced dead in the same newspaper

bring me mildewed books and live recorded poets  
a quiet flamenco with arms and hands  
a stepping stone

## April, Are You Watching Him Dance?

Daniela Violin  
April 30, 2020, Toronto On

Yes I am  
Only in my mind  
and he dances like  
that Dierks Bentley song  
on steroids  
Come a little closer baby  
Mr. Greer makes  
me think of another man

and I take a vacation from writing  
“Partira come calma” because  
All the words in their mouths  
Need to be expressed  
Before I write another word;  
He says I’m lost in the thrill of it all  
and he wakes me up again

We’re safe at home now  
with very strange lives  
but not much stranger than before  
The TV just tells us to say our prayers  
and screams disaster

Mama watches mass every morning at 8am  
and church bells vibrate through the house  
over my attempts to do something else  
I have impeccable hearing

We are happy, healthy people  
the 3 of us  
because our theories came true  
living separate but interconnected lives

## Epidemic

Patricia Reid  
March 2020 Toronto On

Epidemic  
Covid 19

I hold my breath- My life stops.

My empty arms no longer enfold loved ones.  
They struggle and slowly hug me.  
I am so isolated.  
My smile- hides behind my mask- behind my black mask  
Ordered not to give out free- friendly encouragement ever again.  
Don’t you look- Don’t see me.  
I walk alone- don’t come near- stay away-My soul shrivels up

I cringe at the sight of a naked face smiling at me and flee.

The pain- will it ever go away?  
Will I ever see a naked smile without my body  
Curling up in pain and running away ?

When will it be my turn for the golden JAB ?  
And  
Will my body remember to touch others lovingly again?

I WANT THE GOLDEN JAB.  
AND I WANT MY LIFE BACK AGAIN.

## Incessant Waves

Naomi Hendrickje Laufer,  
jan 11, 2021 Toronto On

I wear the trodden road unleashed  
My face is trapped behind a gag-like cloth  
and sovereign moments seem to cease  
as tenderness is seared and scorched  
and meandering dreams seem obscene  
We cue divorce of kindred time  
Alluvium beckons the hoarders ride  
and airborne filigree  
shouts to misery  
emptying unborn love  
where incessant waves breed darkness  
to our shadows.

## Mark of the Mask

Sean McGlynn  
April 19 2020, St. Thomas On

I tried to hold my hand steady before the Vent.  
I am totally exhausted my emotion spent.  
But this may be the final Good bye,  
One more "I LOVE YOU" before they die.  
They did not teach this in any school I know  
I saved a few, I cried an hour ago.  
But there is hope with the rising sun.  
This virus will not defeat us all, I am not done.  
I took an oath to say I care.  
Hold in my emotions , cry on the stairs.  
One day they will speak of what we did.  
I was there for you I did not hide.  
We are the front lines and the last  
We were beside you when you passed  
Just a Nurse.

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## Pandemic

Ken Macleod  
Jan 15, 2021 Toronto On

You feel the isolation and loneliness of covid life.  
You reel from the high prices on your diet.  
You worry about the world's chaos and strife.  
You hope no one will start another riot!  
Will normal life ever be possible again?  
Will we find happiness, love or real joy?  
Will our health return in body and brain?  
Will parents be able to hug their girl or boy?  
We want the answers right now!  
They seem impossible or at least far away.  
For all covid will take it's final bow .  
Mental health struggles feel this way everyday!  
Will parents be able to hug their girl or boy?  
We want the answers right now!  
They seem impossible or at least far away.  
For all covid will take it's final bow .  
Mental health struggles feel this way everyday!

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## COVID 19 COVID 19

Henrik Kartna  
January 24, 2021, Toronto On

COVID 19 COVID 19

where did you come from  
the beat of an eastern drum

COVID 19 COVID 19

How did you arrive  
by land, air and sea  
that is how you survive

COVID 19 COVID 19

You are spread by nose, eyes and mouth  
You are a pox on our house

COVID 19 COVID 19

You made us fight a great battle  
By medicines and vaccines you rattle

COVID 19 COVID 19

We will get the final victory  
when you are on the dustheap of history

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## FaceMask

Raymond Helkio  
January 2021 Toronto On

Sometimes it's like being in a warm  
Snug safety blanket  
Other times I am drowning  
Deep inside the earth  
I don't scream  
Or the soil  
Will rush in  
Filling my mouth  
Like being imprisoned  
In a hospital  
With a ventilator  
Shoved down my throat

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## The Covid World

Elisha Alladina  
February 3, 2021 Toronto On

Covid has impacted us all  
Everything is closed:  
the banks and malls  
When will we ever return?  
When can we once again earn?

The world appears smaller  
And we are spending dollars  
On businesses and corporations  
Located throughout the nation

## OH, FREEDOM – The Covid Rider

Larry Ewashen,  
February 2021 Creston, BC

The night was dark and dreary; the moon was murky blue  
The air outside it chilled my bones, the ground was frosty dew.  
‘Twas then I heard a moaning; a sound so low and deep  
And tho’ it wasn’t loud at all; it woke me from my sleep  
And I heard the chains a-rattling; and I heard the mournful cry  
And I wondered what it was come forth; across the blood-red sky  
Then I saw the lonely rider; mounted on a silver steed  
And I heard a mirthless chuckle; as he rode on in full speed  
- And I shivered by my window -  
For his face it was all bone; and his eyes were blood  
And his hair was white; and his mouth was blood-flecked foam  
And the chains upon him jangled; and his bones they seem to  
crack  
And he sang a strange unknown song; and the echo brought it  
back  
Then he ended with a dreadful curse; which spoke for years of  
pain:  
“And I’ll curse you and I’ll hound you; ‘till I end this hellish game;  
There’ll be no end to sorrow; and there’s no end to pain,  
And there is no bright to-morrow; for some people in life’s game,”  
I shuddered and I wondered; what was this living death?  
And who was this unearthly creature, that brought a curse into  
life’s breath?

## Hunger Knows No Lockdown

Robert Priest  
January 2021 Toronto On

Hunger knows no lockdown  
It gets in the wind it leaks into rivers  
Crossing borders  
It waits in the soil  
Corroding seed

Hunger keeps no distance  
It comes in close and gets at the throat  
Devouring muscle, weighing down the head  
Hunger gnaws the bone of the belly  
It sucks the marrow  
And leaves nothing on the plate

Pestilence only aids hunger  
Scorched earth feeds it  
War makes hunger stronger.  
With every missile  
Hunger explodes and burrows in deeper

Famine needs no disguise, no lies  
It wears no mask  
Its breath is your breath  
Its naked face an infant face

## The Plague Poem

John Vlachos  
Wednesday 17, 2021 Toronto On

It is a path to a mind in the wilderness.  
An isolated mind, a disingenuous mind  
A crippled mind fearful of a diseased self.  
The manacled psyche thrashing against masks  
And masks of masks hiding the pity of it.  
A riotous pandemic of merciless entanglement  
A lost pathetic enzyme, rebel of the flesh  
Rogues of insane atoms exploding  
On the population of masks, lockdown masks  
Quarantine masks, gloves and masks  
We are a hybrid of insane Sapiens,  
Plagued by a plague we spawned.  
No touching, no contact  
The isolation is complete  
We are not human anymore.

## God in this Pandemic

Husain Mehdi  
2020 06 06 Mississauga On

In the time of the pandemic,  
the sky turned a clear blue  
and the air smelled fresh and lavenderish.  
Carbon emissions plummeted below compliance.  
The world smelled of roasting marshmallows.

god herself came down from  
the penthouse using a swift lift,  
dressed as Wonder Woman,  
to admire the cleanth from the ground.

Watching from the corner, I Instantly  
fall in love. She could fix it I know,  
But she'd rather not, judging from the  
scornful rose petal turn of her upper lip  
and the toss of her curls.

'Shit', she said, and being multilingual adding  
for good measure, 'merde, scata, scheisse, szar'.  
'Try to kill the bastards', she mutters,  
'and they clean up. What a holy mess'.

I run after her to profess love,  
but her swift lift has risen.  
I never see her again.



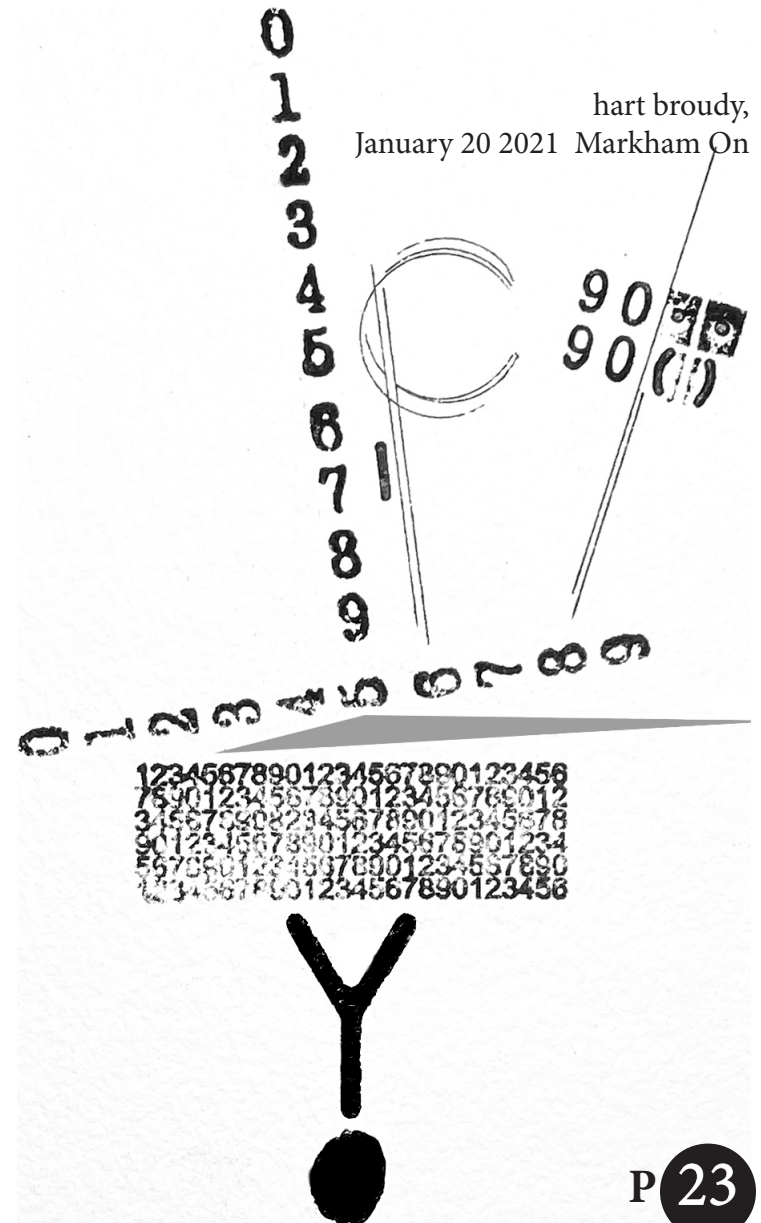
# Poem For The Year 2020

Kegan McFadden,  
December 2020 Victoria Bc

O

# Mutator

hart broudy,  
January 20 2021 Markham On



22

## why we

bill bissett  
jan 2021 Mattawa, On

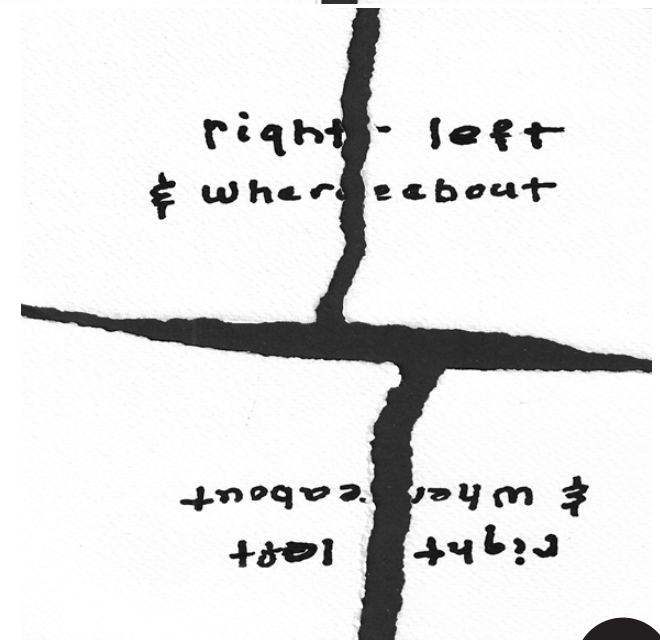
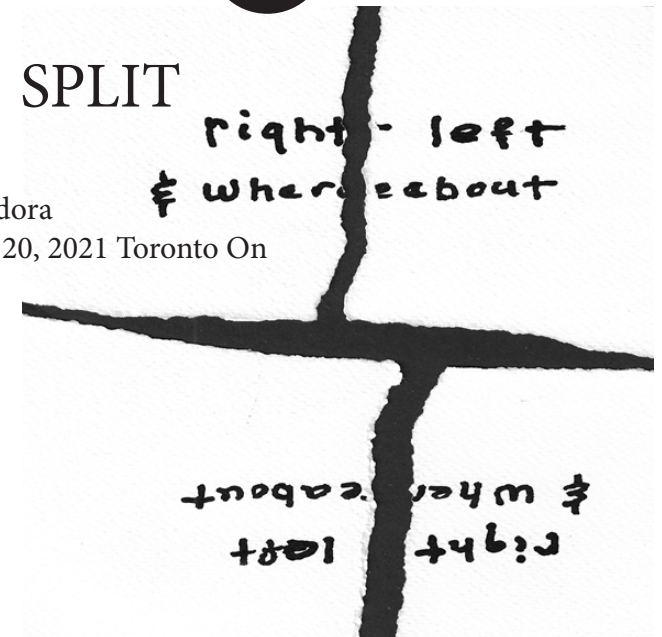
yu love sum peopul verree much  
breeth in n out breeth in n out  
sum peopul love yu verree much  
theyr not always th same peopul  
thers a spell full moon in scorio  
yu feel alone its a spell pray  
howevr yu dew that 4 all th millyuns  
uv peopul going 2 spirit all ovr th  
world put them in th lite howevr yu  
dew that sew they dont feel sew alone  
ium dewing that 2nite goldn star floating  
galaxee mushroom dreems if yu feel  
unlovd n left out  
uv sum thing th spell is our  
worree abt all th peopul  
going 2 spirit breeth in  
breeth out breeth in breathing  
out yr breth is th candul  
in th darkness th lite  
softlee sing 2 them with

P 24

23

## SPLIT

Brian Dedora  
February 20, 2021 Toronto On



no matter how you turn it  
it's still split

P 25

## Post Pandemic hope

Kathleen Reichelt  
february 01 2021 Thousand Islands On

when the masks are no longer needed  
I hope we'll keep needing each other  
the way we do in our small rooms  
I hope we'll keep these doors open  
flowing our desire  
    for contact between chambers  
letting hearts be heard as birdsong  
I hope we'll keep singing praises  
    for every sun rise  
    for every song an old friend shares  
    for the new friend who says  
    I'm here too  
I hope we'll hug the trees without worry  
of appearing silly  
I hope we'll never cut each other down  
again  
I hope we'll be braver to say this is me  
and it's okay if you want to stay inside  
we're all turtles  
the great day standing in the sun is coming  
so close now I can feel the body make heat  
    together all of us glow

## Shaftesbury

Ayesha Chatterjee  
October 13, 2020 Toronto On

This city eludes me. It slides like a yo-yo  
all the way up Yonge to Richmond Hill  
and back into my hand. Mostly now, it's a bit of sky,  
  
some shops, children's voices. The shudder  
of a freight train. Evenings, a helicopter  
offends the startling October air.  
  
The CN Tower still doesn't belong  
to me. Neither does the lake.  
I don't understand them.  
  
Instead, on Shaftesbury, a redbud guards  
the pretty, gleaming bones  
of four white chairs. Whiplash.

26

# From The Book Of Lumentations: EICHA V

Adeena Karasick

June 1, 2020 New York City, New York

Our letters have been turned over to strangers, our light to aliens.

We have become orphans, our murmurs, widows.

Our nostalgia we have drunk for payment; our words come by  
purchase.

And in the wracked circuits of asylum

we are arrested in the wrought of the wilderness.

Our skin is parched, scarred in the heat of hunger.

They have outraged whimsy in the cities.

Hegemony was hanged by its hands, curtained with contingency

Hours carry the counting; mouths gagged under the policing

The prowl of our heart has ceased, our dancing has turned to  
mourning.

Our skin has fallen.

Gone is the luster that lies longing through the shuttered gates  
of sunwashed words

girded

skinside

P 28

27

# lock me away 2021

Stephen Roxborough

february 24, 2021 whidbey itsland washington

i used to be a tourist in my own town  
but now i don't get out to see the sights

last year i had a fever with muscle aches  
& daily lethargy & lost my sense of smell  
never thought i'd make it up that hill  
how the hell did this life form find me

have you thanked a grocery worker lately?  
is standing in line anywhere worth it?

we stopped wheezing while making love  
so i made reservations for a vaccine  
but i have a serious fear of injections  
i'm not paranoid am i paranoid?

do i spend too much time in bed?  
do i chew too much news in my head?

so far i know 3 people who died of covid  
yet i know more than 3 who think  
it's a powerplay to subjugate the masses  
my mask doesn't bother me anymore

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## My Community / Isolation

Thania Valle  
February 25, 2021 Toronto On

### My Community / Isolation

My community knows isolation,  
We've dealt with it from all sides,  
We've felt it from family and friends,  
Doctors and nurses alike.

Isolation can be a killer,  
If left unchecked over days and nights,  
Our community can't give up to it now,  
It's our time to show how we can fight.

When isolation rears its ugly head,  
We must stand firm and give kindness instead,  
We must not bend, but show love until the end,  
Please don't leave us alone.

Isolation is the reason,  
To show up for others this COVID season,  
It's a difficult task at best,  
And will put all to the test.

So don't ever give up,  
If left alone to your own luck.  
We'll get through this together.  
COVID can be beat.

## The End of the Tunnel

Kate Louise DeJong  
February 27, 2021 Toronto On

when this is all over --  
this dreadful scourge,  
we shall gather once more  
and seek society at large.

I long for the time when  
I can reclaim my life,  
go through the days  
without so much strife.

visit the friends who I now  
shun out of fear,  
the risk of infection being  
always so near.

and browse through the shelves  
of the library or bookstore  
searching for our true selves  
among titles galore.

there will be a spring  
that follows this gloomy winter.  
then shall we sing -'  
of good health and fine weather.

30

## New Social Etiquette

PJ Thomas  
March 23rd 2020 Peterborough On

There were no people here today  
save the landlady  
smoking on the porch,  
and the absolute joy I found  
in standing 6 feet away from her  
and hearing, seeing, and perceiving  
a realsteph human being  
was both heart-warming and tender.  
The pizza delivery person has become  
a star of entertainment  
and an honoured guest at the feast,  
putting in a cameo appearance  
and disappearing in a flash.

P 32

31

## A Poem for the Pandemic

Elizabeth Sherk  
Monday, March 29. 2021 Scarborough On

All lights on  
Search through clutter  
Memory muddle  
What is worth remembering?

March 2020 to March 2021  
Twelve months of compliant attention  
To radio announcers daily enunciating  
The rise and fall of sick folk succumbing  
Frontline workers and ICU's capacity overflowing

Walking our neighbourhoods  
Learning to ZOOM and Facetime our friends  
Listening for the call up of our agemates  
Creating herd immunity by joining vaccine rollout.

Saturday, 9 am, April 10  
At Scarborough Centennial Hospital  
The time we get our jab in the arm  
Worth remembering.

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Dominique Phillimore  
March 29, 2021 Etobicoke On

Over a year ago the enemy virus was given a name COVID 19. Now the virus is variant via vaccine is the resounding outcry heard around the world.

A deadly virus that spreads by close contact transmission of social behavior from one person to another. Example-talking, laughing, hugging, kissing, dancing, singing, coughing, sneezing.

These simple pleasures of our human make-up can now kill us unless we social distance and wear masks. These variants of concern are B117, P1, B1351 are more deadly and transmission rate is doubled. The B117 is of most concern in Canada as younger people aged 18-39 are at higher risk.

People in their twenties are struggling to breathe and clinging to life in an ICU.

We are officially in a third wave, now after several lockdowns and many other restrictions.

The vaccine produced at warp speed has become our magic potion to deliver us from this Hell.



Illustration by bill bissett



There has been a success story with the LTC homes' residents in the great vaccine roll out.

Medical front line workers – doctors, nurses can breath easier having received a vaccination shot.

Don't forget the essential workers, the truck drivers at the border, ttc workers, staff in drug and food stores. They are true heros as they put there lives on the line daily for over a year to help and save others. Mass vaccination clinics and pharmacies giving Pfizer, Moderna, Astrazeneca shots to 60-80 plus. Red light for Astrazeneca in Canada-severe blood clots in women under 55 in Europe. One point five million doses Astrazeneca from US delivered today-bad timing!

Variants rose sixty four percent in one week, ICU is 421 in Ontario, yet stores and patios open!

Spring Break and Easter-people wiser or will medical restrictions be broken?

Learn from looking at loved ones through glass or listening to last words on a phone.

Music from balcony and neighbours cooking food for others. Rainbows against the window put a loving smile on a grand parent's face. Humanity is strong and striving despite despair and death.

The human spirit survives as the shining light at the end of the tunnel. Mourn the dead and we must never forget.

## Carnival Quietude

Catherine ODonnell  
Feb/March 2021 St.Thomas On

It happened quickly, then took so long to unveil  
making sense of quiet and space  
echoes of a carnival - memories ring and reverberate still  
A barking carney's resounding cries, illusive now  
The ramblings of busyness and hustle, surges of noisy jam-packed  
gaggles  
ferris wheel of the daily grind churned to a halt  
stillness so unusual, it leaves a ringing in the ears  
popcorn whiffs lingering, coloured lights flickering  
imprint on my mind now a longing  
Standing alone in a cavernous Midway  
rides abruptly halted, thrills no more exalted  
internal ramblings with no witness  
flaming wheels of human warmth, driven by confusion  
and exclusion doused with waters of fearful caution  
Blinking, popping lights and sticky shoe-soles galore  
give way to murmuring radio mornings, Barking carneys no more  
A wondrous stretch of time about and beyond, wondering what's in  
store

## Another Birthday

Ellen S. Jaffe

March 15-28, 2021 Toronto On

Thinning crowd trickles down to me, down to me  
alone with my thoughts, not always so great  
It's up to me to shine the lights now, ring the bells, and guess my weight  
Claim the prize that is my own companionship

Sing out loud, beckon trusty company  
walking my dog who saunters without fear  
Remembering vibrations, shouts of glee and Cheers!!  
the shine of camaraderie  
Make a grand plan, to come back next year.

Another birthday, my third since diagnosis.  
At first I thought I'd be buried by now,  
then life unfolded again,  
like the crocus and iris we planted,  
the day lilies, opening and closing.

Our love, which could have been buried in despair,  
chemo and radiation, medical jargon,  
has flourished during this time,  
roots digging deeper, flowers  
shimmering in the light.

Last year covid hit, another setback,  
or a turning-point -- now everyone, like me,  
worries about sudden illness,  
fearing death by talking to neighbours,  
or buying groceries  
(and this year, that came to pass, by gunshot in Boulder --  
there are many fears, many ways to die).

We've survived another year, you and I.  
I still feel well, despite the CT scans, the doctors' puzzlement,  
and this birthday I'm surrounded by flowers.

## Dear Covid

Pamela Chynn

February 14th/2021 Kensington market Toronto On

I unearth  
memories of my past --  
my father, mother, grandmother, great-aunts,  
scenery from camping trips and travels.  
Another Passover comes, too -- crossing  
from the known into the wilderness,  
looking for freedom.

Next year, what will my birthday bring?  
A nameless void,  
or still holding on for dear life, savouring its flavor?  
Beware the Ides of March --  
No, be aware, be care-full, full of caring  
for myself and for the world around me  
connected through earth and air, water and light  
and the feelings/thoughts/words  
that spring to mind.

Dear Covid,

The thrill is gone baby. When this first started, I felt exhausted from running around, taking care of this and that, and still going nowhere. For a short while, I was relieved when you insisted I stay home. I totally embraced the Martha Steward lifestyle- cooking, decorating, rearranging the furniture, putting up shelves, doing homemade facials and DIY crafts all day long. The cocooning thing definitely felt like this is where it's at. It was a safe place as the world swiftly spiraled out of control. People were fist fighting in the grocery aisles over toilet paper. It made sense considering everything was going to shit. I never imagined that I would be considered responsible for sitting on my couch all day long, smoking dope and painting my nails. Is this the new adulting? 20/20. Isn't that what they mean when they say you have perfect vision, when you can see everything so clearly? Sadly, that often only comes Fed-exed to you by hind-sight as you examine moments like the x-rays of broken bones. I've had p-l-e-n-t-y of time to think.

Dear Covid

I've grown stronger and smarter because of everything you put me through. I am so done with this. I need to move on. Being a cocoon diva has lost its novelty. I'm tired of obsessively glue-gunning sparkles and shells on everything in sight within my tiny closet-sized apartment because there's nothing else to do. Don't even think about spicing things up by suggesting a threesome with you and me and the new normal but I will tell you what's really hot to me –The hope that when this is over there will be a better normal. Better than the world has ever known before, better than that social dumpster fire reality show version of The Hunger Games led by an orange pumpkin head. You kept telling me that you were leaving but never did. You kept coming back. Like everything else that made me question my sanity, you're hard to get rid of. Counting down the days when I'll be able to do the David Bowie thing, put on your red shoes and dance the blues, I dance all the way back to Mexico when Corona was known only a beer best served chilled with a twist of lime.

Sincerely,

I'm so over you.

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## Forgotten Drains

Frances Elaina,  
February 18, 2021 Toronto On

Don't you ever  
*Dream?*  
Far-fetched  
From  
Reality  
Anxiety  
Climbs up  
Forgotten  
Drains  
To the chorus of sirens  
*Blaring*  
*For your*  
*Protection*  
Purple toes  
Reveal  
Tiny  
Holes  
In a faded  
Perception of  
Security  
Itching  
For a ride  
On a  
Unicorn's  
Back  
With shiny

*Perfect* views  
Of the  
Countryside  
Smells like  
Watermelon  
Lip Gloss  
Rarely  
Hear  
*Any*  
Bad news

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## Faith

elaine stewart  
march 15- april 9, 2021 Toronto On

it began  
    in silence  
    a moment unheard of

then  
    joy  
birds sharing their song

there was purity  
    there was no otherness

too soon i fell backwards  
    towards sorrow  
    towards grief  
    sitting emptiness  
    empty

i want to sigh into it  
    to breathe  
    to sit with the ah  
    empathy

reaching wildly  
    pushing forward  
    falling forever

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## Masks

Sarah Jarvis  
February 27, 2021 Windsor On

Find fabric squares. Elastic. Check labels.  
Pillowcases, sheets, best quilt fabric, unfinished projects,  
the stash  
    Haul out the Singer from storage.

At first just a couple to wear if needed.  
Supplementing some disposables kicking around from an  
earlier crisis.

Then as gifts for others  
    kits of increasing sophistication, pre-cut with instructions  
from collectives.  
The kids' sizes, they break your heart. Scrub caps stitching  
back broken hair and spirit.  
Style, construction evolves, but  
    unceasing demand.

Exponential need.  
Processes, hacks, tips, methods – all evolving  
Utterly disparate people – mostly women  
(Would this be the Women's Institute in another war?)  
together. Focused. Competitive. Supportive.  
Fighting to keep up. A process so long  
we now replace what has already worn out.  
Nigh on a year.

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## Exponential

Ian Cognitō  
September 2020 YellowPoint BC

Anxiety is a hungry monster  
greedy for those moments of crisis  
and consternation  
yet to manifest  
It sees danger that can't yet  
be seen  
Looks over its shoulder  
furtively, panic-stricken  
for sabre-tooth tigers  
and their modern-day proxies

The anxious person will know  
the sky is falling at the very first sign  
before anyone else can cotton on  
Trouble is  
no one will believe her  
when the time arrives because  
she has talked about it too often

Don't they understand?

She has always, always, been preparing  
for this moment  
Always at-the-ready

And now  
she has gotten herself to safety

While the rest of us, grasshoppers  
are still at play

Getting no ice time:  
a sonnet of sorts

Heidi Greco  
March 2020 Surrey BC

Yet another weekend with no NHL  
no sports of any sort, not even cricket or darts.  
I didn't know why, but again I could tell,  
you were getting all high-stickish on me.

As if there were no such thing as a time out, or  
a penalty for roughing up the grey-knuckled potatoes  
as you smashed them in the pot. No instant replay  
for backhanded taunts, harsh words crossing the blue line.

And I'm wishing the guy in stripes would show up,  
if only he'd blow the whistle, hand out two minutes  
in the box to cool down. Can't he see that we  
could use an assist? I keep trying to make the save:

wanting to remind you – those long ago sweaty afternoons,  
naked in the days of cold beer and hot romance.

## Weathering

George Elliott Clarke  
17 Avril MMXX

Spring brings the dash and splash of rain—  
So leaves upholster—bolster—trees,  
And home can be outdoors again,  
Our faces bared to kiss each breeze.

Winter's woeful, doleful weather  
Made us standoffish, stand apart,  
Fearing that to stand together  
Would grant Disease an instant start.

Now willows dangle rambunctious  
Tendrils—green fronds that vein the wind,  
While pale trilliums jitter—conscious,  
That Beauty and Peril come twinned.

From each sanctuary cocoon,  
Let each citizen resurrect—  
Feverish to touch, clutch, and swoon,  
Ending forced, traumatic Neglect.

Uncompromising is Beauty—  
And Love—while frost—to blossoms—melts.  
To breathe is to love. Our duty?  
To spy—past clouds—how light results.

## Loop

Ellie Csepregi  
April 15th, 2021 Windsor On

each ↺  
time  
you  
sink  
you  
ReSurFace  
you  
do  
good  
you  
do  
well ↻



## Pandemic Dreamer

Richard Paul

Apr.15, 2021 Mississauga On

What happened to those carefree days  
 My shell shocked psyche, my erratic ways  
 The days are grayer, the sun is dark  
 The shadows hang clouds set to park  
 I should have fought, should have stood my ground  
 Before pandemics shadow was cast and found  
 So many things I could not stop  
 My two big teachers were lies and theft  
 By friends I thought but were bereft  
 But now I dwell all alone, friends are few  
 The days go by without a clue  
 What will pass or who will call  
 I know not when the angels fall  
 If I could pass on just one small clue  
 I would say to others don't let karma come due  
 Do unto to others as you would have them do to you  
 Is the golden rule that always rings true  
 Let the past go but don't forget  
 The future that comes is not quite set  
 Can dreams set free  
 Bring freedom to me?

Somehow I hold on to this mortal coil  
 I should be gone but that was foiled  
 I know not when my life's cost comes due  
 Significance found and lost each day  
 Mere existence exists is what I say

I grew up dreaming  
 Now the dreams are gone,  
 Yet now I find  
 What is on my mind  
 Is all those dreams are all I have?  
 Am I just one hollow holograph?  
 Help me find pandemic's song  
 I know not where my heart has gone.

## Simple Hug Beautiful Kiss

L L Schatz

April 15, 2021 Vancouver BC

COVID-19 what does this mean  
 composing the New World Order  
 out with the old in with the new starting at international borders  
 the simple hug the beautiful kiss  
 awaiting government orders

i cheered my nephew's graduation long distance face time preview  
 celebratory confinement while mother recovered in another country  
 blessed be the new army herald the heroes in medical trenches  
 scar faced strained anguished from their mercies  
 all in the name of personal sacrifice  
 summon the scientist for the vaccine mining  
 yet i wait for the grand allure of life outside again  
 the simple hug the beautiful kiss

tonight aligning myself with the stars  
 the lifted veil reveals myself as i am  
 close open open close on this hermetic journey  
 day speeds up night slows down  
 sleep offsets psychosis trembling from a foggy dream

i am lifted by Spirit and mr. belly  
 while angels carry my prayers that emanate  
 for the dearest souls who flock the gate  
 yet still i wait. i cry and wait  
 i'm waiting for you to buzz my front door bell  
 cutting disappointment masking itself as patients

i wait still...  
 a porcelain vase on the blue window sill  
 trying not to crack  
 clutching to hope waiting...for  
 the simple hug the beautiful kiss  
 awaiting government orders  
 son

will i ever see you again?

# Sixty-two Hours Silent

Treese Flenniken

October 26, 2020 Burlington On

throwing up words  
thought long ago  
never left the soul

sat on the picket fence  
teetering tentatively  
no value contained

feels that way most days  
missed it seems  
nowhere

the indrawn, quiet contemplation  
fiercely guarded, protected  
each day silent

seals them even tighter  
sucked back into the void  
lost forever!

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October 26, 2020

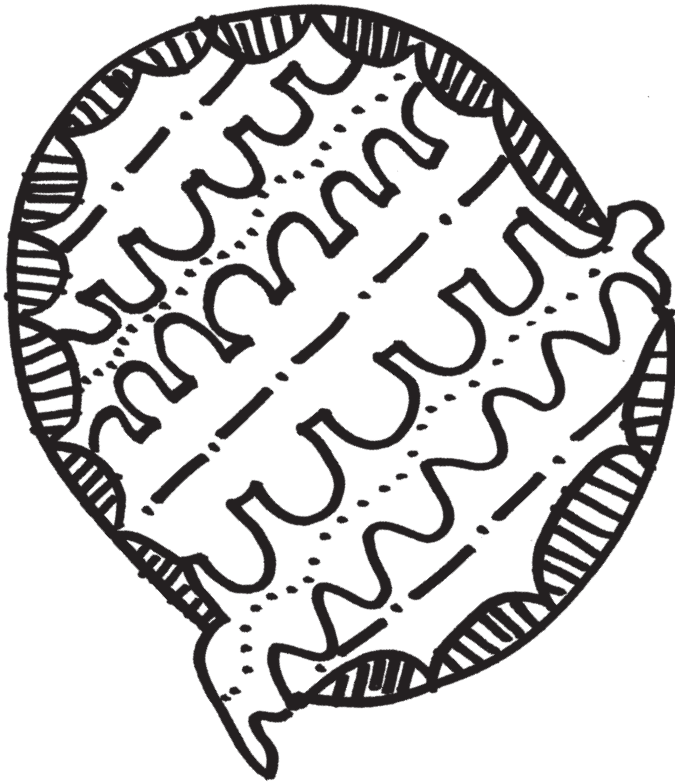


Illustration by bill bissett