

The Coronavirus Poetry Issue



Irene Toh, Editor

A POETIC RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

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The Pandemic Issue

The poets in this collection gave witness to a pandemic that had taken over the world since March 2020. Italy was the first European country to go into lockdown, and it was a matter of time before Covid-19 became a global pandemic. Over 4 million people have died after contracting Covid-19. At the time of writing, the Delta variant is causing third or fourth waves all over the world.

The pandemic has forced the shutdown of economies and of borders. It was like an apocalypse movie of death and privation. We are so familiar by now with its new lexicon of lockdowns, social distancing, remote working and learning, zoom meetings, swab tests, contact tracing, self-isolation, face masks, vaccinated travel lanes, etc.

The pandemic foregrounded the economic divide, between those with the resources and those without. In particular richer countries have high vaccine rollouts and poorer ones are floundering. People's livelihoods are under threat or have gone under. So although the world is mired in the same threat, it has not handled the crisis on the same level or footing in terms of resources and governance.

Things will not return to pre-coronavirus ways for a while yet. While we're preparing to be Covid resilient, to open borders, we cannot rule out repeated lockdowns and its collateral damage to economies, livelihoods and mental wellness. So it is that our mindsets have been forced to change. What is the state of our psychological well-being? What about lives that have fallen apart and have to be rebuilt? What does a new normal look like? Our poetry must continue to tell these stories.

Note:

This is the third reiteration of the title. The first was released in Fall 2020, the second in Spring 2021 before this final edition. A couple new poems were added but most of the poems were written about a year ago, before or after. Just so you know the different time stamps as you read the poems. The earlier issues may be found under the red wolf issues tab on <https://redwolfjournal.wordpress.com/red-wolf-issues/>

Irene Toh
Editor
August 2021

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Yet Saltash is still Saltash,
sleeping in pandemic coma,
still bathed in a glow of inconsequence
with nothing much to sell and
carpet-slipped old folk
shambling nowhere.

— Jane Newberry, “Lines Below the Bridge”

It's Not That Simple Staying Indoors For Three Months
by Misky Braendeholm

Just now I was thinking about us and how you used to say things never last and do you remember when we'd stop after school and share an ice cream and you'd always say nothing ever lasts and your ice cream melted and dripped down your arm and I'd say, Really why not? and you said it's just not that simple and at the time I didn't see why not and just now as I'm sitting in my favourite chair enjoying the bright colours of spring and listening to bird song and reading about another 655 people dying from the Coronavirus and me all closeted away self-isolating, and well that's when I suddenly realised: life just isn't that simple.

We're Parked in Cupboards
by Misky Braendeholm

I took a chair to the window,
listened to the silence. It was
sharp and thin as mountain air.
The world has nowhere to go.

Our cars parked up in cupboards,
the trains are off their tracks,
planes downed by something
in the air. We're all parked up.

I watched the middle tree of
three bending long in the wind.
Next spring, I think I'll crowd
the window boxes with colour.

Process notes: As Covid numbers increase and we're all threatened with another lock-down, I look toward Spring and make plans for the garden.

Sometimes Distance Is Never Far Enough
By Misky Braendeholm

What's distance look like to you?
Is it measured like arm's length,
or is it as abstract as the word.
Is your distance blurred like mine,

and does sex remind you that you
are mortal, that one day warmth
will leave your body behind.
Undoubtedly, that is distance.

And once when my heart was young,
I was on the edge of being loved.
But no. Unrequited. Is that what
distance feels like. Abandoned
faith, like an empty church.

I'm coming out of my hidey-hole.
Me, like a sheered sheep, old mutton.
My endless summers are vanishing.
I feel age, and I feel its distance.

Process Notes:

As the Lockdown in the UK slowly lifts, we are re-assessing what distance means. No one seems exactly sure what's what - an arm's length; a broom handle; an umbrella.

Misky Braendeholm's work is regularly published in monthly issues of *Waterways in the Mainstream - Ten Penny Players*, *Visual Verse*, and *Right Hand Pointing*.

Winter 2020, a Sonnet
by Wendy Taylor Carlisle

This is the time of year for fever, the time
for downed timber, for masks in the grocery
and for seeing through the trees, how many

trailer houses sprouted up this summer.
Out in the chill, we find Indian currant
on the trail, shocking pink berries chilled to purple,

bird-fodder to the end of winter. We pass
a low-scarred elder, where baby bucks have
sharpened new antlers, count wild cherry logs,

pumpkin orange. There are galls on the Oak,
eggshell thin, caterpillars gone. This is the cold time,
time for sickness and loss, the rain crow vanished,

whose stutter and croak called out storms. We urge the one
last persimmon from its tree, find it gone rotten.

Wendy Taylor Carlisle lives and writes in the Arkansas Ozarks. She is the author of four books and five chapbooks and is the 2020 winner of the Phillip H. McMath Post-Publication Award for *The Mercy of Traffic*. Her website is www.wendytaylorcarlisle.com.

Pandemic Days
by Mike Dillon

In spring the herring came, shoals of them glittering beneath the public dock like stampeded flashes of silver. The milt they spread in eel grass turned the water a strange blue-green. “Never seen the like,” an old-timer muttered through his mask. Southeast across the water, the distant, lathe-like hum of Seattle, a city of steel and glass towers, had fallen almost silent.

More was to come.

Gluttonous sea lions with their Colonel Blimp faces showed up in unheard-of-numbers, making big waves in their pursuit of a meal, and almost capsized a hot-dog kayaker dude who got too close. They kept our town awake as they barked through the night. “Never heard the like,” muttered the old timer through his mask.

More was to come.

The sea lions attracted a pod of orcas, their black and white bodies rising and falling farther out beyond the dock in their pursuit of a meal. Masked villagers stood on the dock watching like Englanders viewing a dogfight over the White Cliffs of Dover in the dangerous summer of 1940. Days later, porpoises threaded a bottleneck opening to the long bay nearby, where they took shelter from the orcas. “Never seen porpoises in the bay before,” muttered the old-timer.

There is more.

One day in mid-summer the town shaman, nearing sixty, who disappeared five years before, came walking down the road wearing the same dirty windbreaker and blue jeans he had on when he disappeared. He still had his blond dreadlocks and half-hearted goatee. Overall, he was more rumped than before but still intact. He wore no mask; just his Cheshire-cat grin instead. “Where you been?” I said. “I was a little worried.” “The other side,” he sort of smiled. “You mean over in Seattle?” His wet, blue eyes gazed into mine. “No, the other side.”

Summer came.

Hot. Dry. Herring, sea lions, orcas, porpoises, shaman — all departed. The public dock remained a safe zone, a mini-Switzerland of neutrality from those obvious things no one wanted to talk about. In September, the first alder leaves drifted down into the nearby spawning stream, where black-snouted Chinooks thrashed their way against the current in their dance of death while the west burned. Smoke from Oregon and California made the sun a dull gob overhead. “No one’s seen anything like it,” the old-timer muttered. All of us standing on the dock, masked-up, nodded.

“Something more is sure to come,” he said.

Masked
by Mike Dillon

Masked within an invisible fog of plague,
our tongues make way for the wordless language
of our eyes.
And sometimes I look into a quiet beauty
I'd never seen.

Mike Dillon lives in Indianola, Washington, a small town on Puget Sound northwest of Seattle. He is the author of four books of poetry and three books of haiku. Several of his haiku were included in *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*, from W.W. Norton (2013). His most recent book, *Departures: Poetry and Prose on the Removal of Bainbridge Island's Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor*, was published by Unsolicited Press in April 2019.

A Sense of Déjà vu
by Preeth Ganapathy

Scores of people wait at the bus stop
with green and white masks
adorning their face

Hand hygiene, social distancing, geo fencing
and other such technical terms
find a place in the common vocabulary.

Wheat flour, soap, rice and lentils
take off from the racks faster than
the speed of changing thoughts in a cluttered mind.

Offices shut down, schools close
entertainment no longer matters
in the clamour for base survival.

How do the viruses enter human life?
through contact alone?
or are they airborne?

They inhabit a being who dispenses them freely
as he moves around.
Like a walking beehive.

Tiny organisms that are left behind start their own startup
sponging on the fertile ground of fresh blood and soft tissues
causing death to do a geometric progression

All those sci-fi movies of the yore
spelling apocalyptic doom
did not lie after all.

Preeth Ganapathy lives in Bengaluru, India. Her works have been published in a number of online magazines including the *Short Humour Site*, *Spark* and *The Literary Yard*.

Lockdown silver
(after 'Silver' by Walter de la Mare)
by Marion Leeper

Last night the moon dropped in to pass the time of night.
She kicked off her silver shoes
and perched in the branches of the sycamore.
My feet, bare as hers, burnt on the frosty ground.

She told me the news: lights glowing
in houses all along the world's girth.
The beating heartaches in each little box
beneath the silver casements.

I looked into her single eye. She told me
these branches, blocking out the sky
were not bars, but the edges of a lens.
She said, 'Look closer. Inwards.'

Then she was off, round the church tower, widdershins,
Leaving me in the streetlight's neon stripes.
Until sleep claimed me, warm
with silver feathers and the ripples of shining fish.

Process notes:

I made this poem one sleepless night early in lockdown: it comes from a revisiting of poetry familiar from childhood, and also while working on a collection of moon legends from around the world.

Marion Leeper is a poet and purveyor of stories and tall tales based in Cambridge, UK. She fell into poetry when she was elected Bard of Cambridge for a year and has been happily drowning ever since. She has written on storytelling in education, and toured storytelling shows around the UK and beyond. Her poems have appeared in *The Fenland Reed* quarterly, *In Other Words* anthologies for Allographic Press and *Earth, We Are Listening* for Slice of the Moon Books.

Poem about the COVID-19 Pandemic
by Jack e Lorts

I said to me, Jack,
you need to write
a poem about
the COVID-19 pandemic.
All the other poets
are doing it,
and you are getting left out.

The days are passing
and your liver is failing
day by day,
and you are 80 years old.
The pandemic is
leaching away at your liver,
at the days you have left.
You are wasting your time
writing worthless tweets
ridiculing Trump,
how incompetently
he's handling the crisis.

Jack, your days are numbered!
Why should you spend them
wasting your time
ridiculing the most corrupt
and incompetent man
ever to occupy the White House?

NO!

Jack, we're talking about
the last days, weeks of your life.
You're an old man
dying of Cirrhosis of the Liver!
Sure, you **may** have
another five years;
the Doc says it's possible,
but you could die anytime,
Your liver could just
go KUPIT,
give up the ghost
and you're gone.

You're right, Jack.
I've got to write this poem
about the pandemic now,,
before it's too late.

Jack e Lorts is poet & retired educator living in rural eastern Oregon. His poems have appeared widely, if infrequently the past 50+ years such places as *Arizona Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *English Journal*, *Agnostic Lobster*, *High Desert Journal*, and more recently his surrealistic “Ephram Pratt” poems have appeared widely online such places as *Haggard and Halloo*, *Locust*, *Chiron Review*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Phantom Drift*, *Poetry Breakfast* and myriad other places. Author of three earlier chapbooks, among them, *Dear Gilbert Sorrentino & Other Poems* from Finishing Line Press 2011, his most recent book is *The Love Songs of Ephram Pratt* (2019) from Uttered Chaos Press. He first published in the late 1950’s & 60’s in such magazines as Ron Padgett’s *White Dove Review*, George Bowering’s *Open Letter* and the pivotal LA journal *NOMAD*, alongside the early work of such poets as Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Russell Edson, Larry Eigner, Cid Corman, Ron Padgett & Ted Berrigan. He sometimes wonders, what the hell happened.

Lines Below the Bridge
by Jane Newberry

Venturing out in Saltash –
Is this how they felt after Chernobyl?
Everything a little unreal,
certainty provided by the Co-op,
still turquoise, still shabby,
still there and, by the waters's edge
where salt-laden gales wash
the benches, the man from the
Council is doing it again
and mowing the daisies,
the pretty end of town.

Daringly buying coffee, real cappuchino,
sandwiched between the vet and
the barber, time stands still
at Bella's Coffy – gangsta pirates
of yesteryear still hanging,
unchanged by Covid.
Yet Saltash is still Saltash,
sleeping in pandemic coma,
still bathed in a glow of inconsequence
with nothing much to sell and
carpet-slippered old folk
shambling nowhere.

Waiting for the Plague to Pass Over
by Jane Newberry

Do not let fear seep beneath the door.
Swaddled by the golden warmth of love
we need not paint the blood on thresholds any more

or kneel to kiss the earth upon the floor,
protection paid for with a pair of doves,
do not let fear seep beneath the door.

Ancient rituals steeped in visceral gore
have all been superseded from above,
we need not paint the blood on thresholds any more,

yet creeping plague infects both rich and poor –
new rituals, priests with visors, gowns and gloves;
do not let fear seep beneath the door,

and no escape to distant hill or moor
to sanctuaries where tortured souls seek salve;
we need not paint the blood on thresholds any more.

Fearful waiting for the jug to pour
blest unction making us immune and tough,
do not let fear seep beneath the door –
we need not paint the blood on thresholds any more.

Jane Newberry is a children's writer yearning to be a grown-up poet. Retirement three years ago brought more time for trying new literary genres. When not restricted by cancer treatment and Lockdown she enjoys a wide range of musical and arts activities and shares her husband's passion for historic buildings and Celtic Cornwall.

Publications to date:

2008 – *A Sackful of Songs* (Cramer Music);

2012 – *A Sackful of Christmas* (Cramer Music);

2018 – poem in anthology, *The Possibility of Living* - (Poetryspace)

poem shortlisted for Bridport Poetry Prize;

2019 – Poem in anthology, *Dragons of the Prime* (The Emma Press);

2019 – Mi-shan shortlisted for Mslexia Novella Prize;

March 2020 - *Big Green Crocodile* (Otter-Barry Books).

Doing Time Together During Covid19
by Emalisa Rose

I always liked that set.
It had a beige swirly
pattern with a tearose
motif, and a matched
group of wine glasses.
It sat in the curio next
to the kitchen where your
mother's old corning ware
hid. We made a lasagna
(first time we cooked
together) cracked open
a bottle of burgundy, lit
Aunt Renee's candlesticks
looked at the albums with
a nod to the elders that
passed. We talked till the
morning returned, clinking
our glass in a toast to the
life we created; said in the
mother tongue. It was nice.

When not writing poetry, **Emalisa Rose** enjoys crafting with macrame and doll making. She volunteers in animal rescue and knits blankets for shelter pets. She has worked in Special Education. Living by a beach town provides much of the inspiration for her art. Some of her work has appeared in *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Literary Veganism*, *Cholla Needles* and other journals.

I Dreamed The Pandemic Was Purged
by Sally Sandler

when a storm surged off the Mexican Coast
and finally breached California shores
Old Testament style and flushed our streets
with epic amounts of spring clean rain.

In the morning epidemiologists
reported the virus was last seen
in filmy rivers jumping the curbs
in San Diego. Oceanographers

are saying this event makes history;
it seems the rogue virus was scoured
off the street as if it were grease and
guttered down through storm drains and culverts,

beyond nursing homes and airports and
people panic-buying toilet paper in
case of sudden outbreak of indecency.
Then the viscous infusion floated

on high sea swells and coated them with
an enormous oily rainbow just before
ghosting into a grave the experts are sure exists
on the ocean floor. They speculate

that decades later it could be exposed
on the beach by the haunted remains
of the hotel that burned in 1885
like a new local myth, but with the sick

mechanical smell of beach tar. They
also predict in 2320
someone might point with its left frontal lobe
and say: Look, just above that ribbon

of Del Mar sandstone there on the cliff,
that streaked black sediment—do you see?
That was the Pandemic of 2020.

At once transcendent and accessible, **Sally Sandler's** poetry gives overdue voice to her generation of Baby Boomers and their elders. She illuminates their shared concerns over the passage of time and fading idealism, the death of parents, and loss of the environment, while maintaining hope for wisdom yet to come. Sandler writes in form as well as free verse, honoring poetry's roots while addressing contemporary issues. Her poems have been published in *Acumen Literary Journal*, *the MOON Magazine*, *Mused: the BellaOnline Literary Review*, and *Westward Quarterly*. She has three published books of poetry, one biography, and one children's book, all available on Amazon.com.

Burning Down the House
(for Orfeo Angelucci)
by Emil Sinclair

How did I survive
the fire so intense
it melts glass and steel?
My old life in ruins
I am a bewildered tourist
gawking at the rubble
of a terminal moraine.
At glaciers end,
where nothing moves,
my nostrils burn
from acrid smoke
and arctic air.
Fire and ice:
I am Shiva, dancing;
a plague for Athens
in its twilight hours.

Water logged shingles
drop like rotted teeth
from an old man's gums,
through charred cross
beams and empty air
(no ceilings or floors),
to land in heaping piles
of Wednesday's ashes.

I survey the debris:
certificates of security,
burned beyond recognition;
keepsakes of friendship,
brittle and broken;
memories of joy,
twisted into grotesque
masks of mourning
and mordant self-pity.

Fragments of lost souls—
crescent moon-shaped
curls of iridescent ectoplasm—
swim blindly around my feet,
squiggling like headless tadpoles
in a turgid pond,
lamenting their dire fate
with shrill cries of anguish.
A Greek chorus of woe.

With an angry groan
the floor collapses;
the cellar cracks open,
as if by earthquake split
into a deep depression
ringed by sheer rock cliffs.
I am caught by a ledge
altogether too narrow
to sit, or stand, or lie;
my right ankle grabbed
by the outstretched crook
of an ancient gnarled limb.
I dangle precariously
over the dark abyss,
strung upside down
on the thinnest of threads.

From the dim vale below,
the voices call up to me
in a sonorous echo:
“Orfeo! Orfeo!
Orfeo of the bright angels!
Come down to us!
Descend to our kingdom
of restless shades
to reclaim your lost life!”

The call goes unanswered.
For I am The Hanged Man,
suspended in space,
my perspective askew—
caught between worlds—
unable to move, nor
take a full breath.
I am King Minos,
trapped in my palace of doom,
avoiding my Minotaur,
who sleeps,
dreaming fitfully,
alone in his labyrinth.
I am The Fisher King,
with nowhere to go
in the land of waste,
and no hope for the grail
to cure what ails me.

How do I survive
the six degrees
of separation,
the sixth extinction,
the six feet apart,
with no seventh to rest?

I wait for a miracle.
Where is the mothership
to ferry me home?

Process notes:

Orfeo M. Angelucci was an early member of the club of UFO contractees in the 1950s. His case and its archetypal aspects was analyzed by C.G. Jung, in his late, classic work, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1958). Other works referenced include those of Joseph Campbell, T.S. Eliot, and, of course, *Talking Heads*.

Emil Sinclair is the pseudonym of a sometime poet and longtime philosophy professor (teaching at a distance) in New York City.

Contagion Haiku
by Julia C. Spring

1919

Mother, six, got flu
in winter. Spring dazzled her
eyes when she arose.

1952

Scarlet fever lock-
down. Borrowed a Samoyed
and romped in our yard.

1955

Youngest child, proud to
get polio shot before
bossy big sisters.

2020

Virus pounces, no cat
feet for it. How will the kids
remember this time?

Julia Spring is a mostly-retired social worker/lawyer who began writing haiku and short memoir pieces when her professional writing began yearning toward the personal. A number have been published. She was a prizewinner in *Intima's* 2018 contest for essays in compassionate health care.

The Sun Arose Again
by Ivor Steven

There must be a number of silent masks around
Yesterday an old mask flew away at the speed of sound
From behind, the real pieces of what we perceive
Are leftover bones, bleached by sky and sea
Where the worn pebbles lingering in the hand
Fall gently upon lines drawn in the sand
And these new beginnings could be a heavenly gift
As white doves soar above the mourning cliffs

Perhaps the next awakening will be a peaceful one
Full of friendly compassion and wisdom
I'm lucky today, the sun arose again
To light up the hallway, despite the rain
I'll be the first one to walk out the door
And the only one left here, to see her valour

Ivor Steven was formerly an Industrial Chemist, then a Plumber, and has been writing poetry for 19 years. He has had numerous poems published in on-line magazines. He is an active member of the Geelong Writers Inc.(Australia), and is a team member/barista with the on-line magazine *Go Dog Go Cafe* (America).

Lockdown
by Adrienne Stevenson

there's great discomfort, sitting
on this razor's edge of boredom
all voices muted, filtered, distant
human contact dulled to a wave
smiling with eyes only

our decisions all pragmatic
we bow to the necessity of distance
keenest pain that of loneliness
belatedly, we begin to realize
how much we need others

even if we could travel
and that's forbidden now
where would we go to escape?
no haven is secure enough
all choices harsh

Rant Gone Viral
by Adrienne Stevenson

there will be days like this, they said
when all you want to do is find an asshole
(not a difficult task at all) and flay
his hide to cover balls for some sports team

or exult at the latest denialist politician
who succumbs to a disease he claims
doesn't exist, so why should he or anyone else
wear a mask or vaccinate—how dare such cretins

condemn their fellows, families and children
to potentially debilitating disease, even death?
how dare they permit their narrow ideologies
to stomp on the public good? they must believe

themselves invincible, which they are not
—even now more become occupants
of overloaded intensive care facilities
usurping places owed their victims—nonsensical

to focus on saving such useless lackwits
they should be cast into outer darkness
(they believe in that, too) become pariahs
unfit for a society they strive to destroy

our best defense survival: deny their rapture
sweep aside their husks along with their lies
on days like this I imagine a better world
without their ilk in it.

Adrienne Stevenson is a Canadian living in Ottawa, Ontario. Her poetry has been widely published in print and online journals and anthologies, most recently in *Black Bough Poetry*, *MacroMicroCosm*, *Page & Spine*, *Poetry and Covid*, *Jaden*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *Lifespan vol.2*, *Bywords*, *Masque & Spectacle*, *Constellate Literary Journal*, *Uproar*. Twitter @ajs4t

April, May, May Day May Day
by Debi Swim

Day follows day
insipid as cold oatmeal
I choke them down
fall into bed at night
hoping for a dream
but awake to morning
another day, another day
and hunger grows in me
for something but I've
forgotten the taste
of life my taste buds
have dementia and
long for the sound
dingdongding bells
of palsy that drags
half my outlook down
and everything
and nothing
is normal.

Debi Swim poems in West Virginia mostly to prompts from around the net. <https://poetrybydebi.wordpress.com/>

Time and Distance
by Alan Walowitz

Two trains leave Whoville and Anytown at noon
and we're told to determine when they meet,
not to mention if the bodies will be laid aside the tracks,
or they'll be carted off in refrigerated trucks—
so much for the beauty and synergy of math.
Then, soon as we realize it's not us on a train
bound for oblivion, it's only our canned goods lined up
on the patio table to be scrubbed and bleached,
and we watch as the labels fade in the warm spring sun.
After a while we can't tell the garbanzos from the pigeon peas.
Yes, we hoped for the taste of some future hummus,
but maybe those nasty limas could be sufficient for now—
if only this doesn't turn out to be the rest of our lives,
and it's just another maddening and unscheduled stop.

Process notes: I hate math and lima beans and needless deaths and washing my groceries.

Alan Walowitz is a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an Online Community Journal of Poetry. His chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, comes from Osedax Press. The full-length, *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems*, is available from Truth Serum Press. Most recently, from Arroyo Seco Press, is the chapbook *In the Muddle of the Night*, written both trans-continently, and mostly remotely, with poet Betsy Mars.

Boxing at Mar a Lago
by Robert Walton

Morning shaves grown to blue bristles,
Cigarettes in the corners of their mouths,
Hard arms dangling from hard tattoos-
Uncles taught me out back
Where the trashcans squat
And the women don't look.

You can beat a big guy, Kid,
But you got to take a punch,
And another,
And another.
Keep your elbows together;
Keep your gloves up.

Take the punches,
The ones you block,
The ones that get through,
Take the pain - wait,
Wait until he opens up
Then hit him with all you got.

The uncles took punches for years
Until the last punches came along,
Corona virus came along,
And plugged their lungs with
Covid snot
That even the choking
Respirator
Failed to move.

I still keep my gloves up,
My elbows together,
But the Mar a Lago people -
Louis Vuitton shod,
Helmut Lang scented,
Will never open up.

Robert Walton's novel, *Dawn Drums* was awarded first place in the 2014 Arizona Authors Association's literary contest and also won the 2014 Tony Hillerman Best Fiction Award. With Barry Malzberg, Walton wrote *The Man Who Murdered Mozart*, published by Fantasy & SF in 2011. His "Do you feel lucky, Punk?" received a prize in the 2018 Bartleby Snopes dialog only contest. Most recently, his story, "Tryst" was published in *The Ghost Story*. Robert is a retired middle school teacher and a lifelong mountaineer with many ascents in the Sierras and Pinnacles National Park. He lives in King City, California.

Grocery Run
by Jon Wesick

White hair, gaunt bodies, toothless mouths
hidden behind sky-blue facemasks, they wander, listless
as George Romero's zombies, mindless feeding machines
programmed to consume by a cold uncaring universe.
They shuffle inexorably forward, fingering limp broccoli,
flabby Brussels sprouts, and frozen ribs
large as Toyota Camrys.
I imagine them devouring the raw pork,
their dentures, like flesh-eating beetles,
picking the bones clean of pinkish-gray meat.

Glasses fogged, hands covered in contagion
due to the lack of disinfectant wipes at the door,
I push a cart loaded with five-pound bags
of potatoes and onions of dubious provenance.
The shelves, empty as interstellar space.
And although science has proved a vacuum
is more than nothing, I cannot subsist
on quantum fields alone.

Chicken stock, canned tomatoes, still no yeast.
Tough are the soles that tread
the blue, taped arrows on the floor
that knife edge of safety between microscopic assassins
or maybe some giant tentacle that would burst
through the gray linoleum and drag me into the abyss.

A stock boy blocks my path, his barcode reader
threatening as a serial killer's chainsaw.
"Got any eggs?" I ask.
"No, we don't have hand sanitizer.
The store without eggs is across the street."

Lost Summer
by Jon Wesick

White walls, beige carpet, popcorn ceiling, three bookshelves, unused Quebec and Nova Scotia guidebooks, wooden sword, window AC unit with blinking change-filter light, indigo loveseat, IKEA coffee table, Kleenex, Kindle, tea mug, fountain pen, seven plastic storage boxes, exercycle, red-and-gold poster from my feature at the Kerouac Café, chicken stock, canned tomatoes, five pounds of brown rice, cherry mead fermenting in a gallon jug, stand mixer, toaster oven, busted microwave, stove with two broken burners I won't report to the maintenance staff so proud in their refusal to wear face masks, six pair of shoes, disinfectant wipes by the door locked to keep the virus out, two file cabinets, last paycheck, first Social Security check, full-size latex mattress, meditation bench, Thich Nhat Hahn calendar, desk, two office chairs, laptop for Netflix and Zoom meetings

White walls, beige carpet, popcorn ceiling, unused guidebooks, white walls, beige carpet, popcorn ceiling, white walls, beige carpet, popcorn ceiling

Jon Wesick is a regional editor of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. He's published hundreds of poems and stories in journals such as the *Atlanta Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Metal Scratches*, *Pearl*, *Slipstream*, *Space and Time*, *Tales of the Talisman*, and *Zahir*. The editors of *Knot Magazine* nominated his story "The Visitor" for a Pushcart Prize. His poem "Meditation Instruction" won the Editor's Choice Award in the 2016 Spirit First Contest. Another poem "Bread and Circuses" won second place in the 2007 African American Writers and Artists Contest. "Richard Feynman's Commute" shared third place in the 2017 Rhysling Award's short poem category. Jon is the author of the poetry collection *Words of Power, Dances of Freedom* as well as several novels and most recently the short-story collection *The Alchemist's Grandson Changes His Name*.
<http://jonwesick.com>

Finding Home
by Elise Woods

What is home anymore?
I no longer know.
I no longer know what is considered normal.
I can't figure out how to get past the past.
Nor can I accurately plan for the future.

I'm supposed to drive somewhere, right?
Where exactly is it that I should go?
My once clear destination is now unknown.
In my brain, there are glimpses of Maple Trees.
Sounds of laughter and splashing in the neighbor's pool.

My shopping spree in February was a mistake.
No one can fully appreciate my wardrobe in a Zoom call.
I can only gather that I must navigate anew
To a new destination and new definition of what it means
To live, and of what it means, to be home.

Elise Woods is an assistant tutoring coordinator at Jefferson Community & Technical College. Her work has appeared in *The Avenue*, *The Learning Assistance Review*, and *SpreeBeez* magazine.

Ablutions
by Fred Zirm

Now we sing Happy Birthday to ourselves
twice, just in case we don't make it to
next year, as we wash our hands like surgeons,
like that Scottish lady, like Pilate, like priests
in preparation or repentance or faith or fear
for all the good and ill our touch has brought
all the way from China unless we change
our tune and learn to sing together.

After earning a B.A. and M.A. in English from Michigan State and an M.F.A. from the Playwrights Workshop at the University of Iowa, **Fred Zirm** spent nearly 40 years teaching English and drama at an independent school. Since his retirement, he has continued to direct plays but has also focused on writing poetry, flash fiction, and creative nonfiction. His work has been published in about a dozen small literary magazines and anthologies, including *Still Crazy*, *cahoodadoodaling*, *NEAT*, *Voices de la Luna*, *Greek Fire*, and *Objects in the Rearview Mirror*. He lives with his wife and younger daughter in Rockville, MD.

I'm coming out of my hidey-hole.
Me, like a sheered sheep, old mutton.
My endless summers are vanishing.

— Misky Braendeholm, “Sometimes Distance Is Never Far Enough”