UNPRECEDENTED

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BIZA

COMMON

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UNHEARD-OF EXISTENTIAL



Huma

A resilent collection of recorded responses by Tenth Muse crew members in the wake of our school closing, moving off campus, quarantine, isolation, cancelled events, despair, and personal reflection.

A common space in an uncommon time.



none of it's really sunk in yet school closing the move back home graduation being canceled my job essentially being on the line the pandemic the impending recession the lack of empathy in our government policies the people dying everywhere

there's a lot to process i feel like in a weird way that i'm in the movie *The Truman Show* like life isn't real it's just a script and a camera crew and a sadistic director watching everything unfold

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i've developed a routine

wake up brush teeth put in contacts coffee

i get dressed to see nobody now i usually stay in pajamas

i put on makeup one step at a time as if someone's going to look at me as if anyone but my mother my sisters my father is going to be seeing me face to face and then i stare and i stare some more and then i worry i wonder if things will ever be the same again or if this is what forever feels like i look at my schoolwork it looks back at me i look at it harder, it stares back harder i procrastinate and try to make the timego by at varying levels of success

i've had a few breakdowns
i'm trying to get better
about that

i know there are thingsi could be doing i could listen to music make a movie write a song but it's hard to getmotivated to do anything but sit still in the same place because the next day i'll wake up and have another cup of coffee here and then another cup of coffee and then another cup of coffee until it's all over

MIMI OTTAVI JOURNAL ENTRY / SCRIPT 04/01/2020





April 3rd, 2020

It's becoming a...

DAY ONE Having life compartmentalized into boxes may seem organized but it's when those boxes are packed within an afternoon are where things get chaotic. There was order among chaos before, at least a rough path to follow, until chaos and disorder took a new meaning. Now there are just boxes.

Flown

The boxes meant to signify an end but now represent a goodbye that didn't get to happen, endings that didn't get to end. They now sit. Still packed. Fragments of an old life borrowed from and placed back, waiting for their time to return but knowing they won't.

DAY TWO Slowly a new normal is being found because the old one no longer exists, no longer can exist. Eventually those boxes will be unpacked but for now they exist as a reminder of an old home left empty of belongings but full of memories.

I CAN'T CATCH MY BREATH

I'm lost and drifting. Away from shore, I'm unsure where to step. Can foam support this weight?

I knew the waves would pull me away, But I blinked; Unaware, I was in the eye of the storm.

The ink black skies were clear! The clouds snuck up to blur my path. Thunder ringing in my ears. The wind murmuring worried news. Lighting, the buzz of electricity in my hand; My phone, I FUCKING dare you! Give me more bad news! Shoot more saltwater down my throat! Let the salt crystallize my feet! I can't keep kicking.

I want to burst, give some water back To that miserable ocean crushing me, That damn horizon pressing down. I don't want your compression! I want my mom's arms to hold me tight!

I can see her above me, Suited against the rain, Pulling strangers from the water, The waves trying to unseat her boat, And throw her in.

I can't breathe.

I can't stay bottled up. I can't deal with this alone. I can't keep pretending I'm fine but, I can't let her know I'm drowning.

I want to reach out for my mom, To take this weight from me. But there's ice in my throat. I see tears pooling on her mask, Water filling her ventilator. She's drowning too.

I take a breath,

I watch my mom leave for clinic. I walk the dog. I cook dinner. I help my grandma out of her chair. I call my friends and joke. I run the laundry. I cry with my sister. I cry with my sister. I make my mom laugh. I try to draw and write. I do the dishes. I talk with my brother. I stay up late on homework. I tell my mom I love her.

And every fucking day; I walk outside in the dew. I recenter my compass. I dry my eyes, And I take a breath.

I see myself reflected on the surface, I rise up, I step up, Into my mom's boat.

I leave behind my hurricane, But I feel the tidal waves, My hurt behind my eyes. Depression raised up my arms and I sunk into my mom.

We cry together.

CHARLOTTE RODEWALD Covid-19 Update #1 April 6th 2020 | A New Routine



When I bought this desk almost three years ago, I didn't think I would use it much. Until March 23, 2020, I was right—it served as a space for storage, a place for stowing school things, particularly. Until March 23, 2020, I occasionally typed a paper or completed an online assignment at this desk. Until March 23, 2020, most of my homework was done in Clarke's atrium, surrounded by classmates and friends. Until March 23, 2020, I drove to and from Clarke University, sometimes more often than I wanted to.

March 23, 2020 marked the day that my \$30 desk from Target became my pathetic replacement for the atrium, the library, and Clarke University. It was the day that I began using Zoom and FaceTime as a substitute for the hours I spent with my friends. It was the first day of online classes for the rest of the semester. It was the day that my desk became my new normal.

A change in work space has been difficult. As much as I feel odd, sad, and even angry at times, I am more thankful now than I have ever been. Thankful for my health. Thankful for my family. Thankful for my house, WiFi, yard. . . and desk. My mom used to have this really complicated puzzle when i was younger. She used to work on it from time to time, and I tried helping but usually struggled with the complexity of piecing the puzzle together. She was always calm about it, knowing that each piece belonged somewhere, she just had yet to figure that out.

I now have my own puzzle, both literally and metaphorically. Due to the circumstances of life. I went out and bought one very similar to the one my own mom had. I usually work on it at night, using it as a mental detox from the strains of homework and work. It took me a while to get used to my new schedule of staying home, but I am slowly figuring it out, piecing it together like a puzzle. It's currently scattered all over my table right now, but i know that eventually, I will be able to create a larger picture from all the pieces. I feel it is the perfect metaphor for my life, too. My life feels scattered. unknown, chaotic in my own way. But just as my mom was sure of the puzzle from my childhood, I know I will be able to find that each piece of my life belongs somewhere right now: I just have to figure out where on my own.

PIECING MY LIFE TOGETHER

EMILY SMITH March 29th, 2020



Music has been a big part of my life. I grew up living in the middle of almost nowhere listening to country music. As I grew older, my tastes expanded, even into different languages. Now, I listen to music every day.

Sometimes all day.

Needless to say, my headphones get their money's worth.

When the whole e-learning thing started, I realized I was looping the same song. I decided to make myself a list of songs that I would have on repeat each day. It started March 23rd with a song called "Winter Flower" and now includes songs from Taylor Swift, Post Malone, Alessia Cara, and Halsey among others. Each song has its own unique meaning with the lyrics. I'm a sucker for lyrics that really hit home. They help me think and clear my mind.

The repetition of a song each day gets me focused quicker. That way I don't get totally distracted, but I would be lying if I said I never got distracted and lost motivation. When I look back at my list of songs, I'll think about this whole coronavirus outbreak and be able to remember each day. Each Song of the Day has helped me stay more or less sane, so thank God for Spotify.



Every day I hear a new headline.

More cases have emerged, more testing has been administered, and stay at home orders are extended.

I become sick of the reoccurring headlines, the numerous Facebook posts I see of friends and family addressing the Covid-19 Pandemic. I try and recall a time where I could browse through social media and see positives. I try and remember people posting about achievements, weddings, and sharing comical images. Today all I see are shares from Fox News, CNN, or the CDC.

I perform a simple task of filling my car with gasoline and miss interacting with store clerks. Instead I now see signs reading "pay at pump only".

I recall simpler times when I could walk into local stores and interact with people I know, and even people I don't know. Instead I now see a hysterical society full of masks and gloves.

I watch the nightly news in hopes of seeing positive stories or learning about the upcoming forecasts. But instead I see again another Coronavirus Task Force meeting or interviews with individuals whose businesses are crumbling.

I try to remain hopeful and remember the days when shaking a person's hand was not frowned upon or seeing a stranger's friendly smile. I reminisce about visiting a bar and grabbing a beer with my buddies and learning about the positive events in their lives. Instead we are forced to Facetime each other in hopes of a day when we can all celebrate our college graduations.

But instead I turn on the TV and open Facebook, and again I am greeted with the same negative stories.

Every day I hear a new headline.

QUARANTINE WEALTH **DIVERSIFIED SYSTEMS** RECONSTRUCTED VALUES

Where respirators and toilet paper are your luxury items worth hundreds of dollars, you know we are living through interesting times. It is part of our capitalist society that we value certain items more than others, whether through demand or quality. It truly is only mass fear and panic that can change our value system so drastically that toilet paper, something used to clean up waste and be discarded, has to be regulated to one pack per person. It has become a scarce item. It took my family a month to find another pack

What makes this that much more astounding, is toilet papers lack of relevance to the current virus. It was misinformation that started the bulk buying of toilet paper. Early rumors said Covid-19 caused gastrointestinal issues, not the much more dangerous respiratory issues. This is proof that it is the consumer mind that drives the economy, the decisions of the public, but most importantly, the fear of the public.

Large companies and corporations have used advertising and manipulative methods to sway our thoughts and preferences towards their products, but it is clear that the most effective way to make something the most valuable thing in the world, is striking the fear of God into someone if they don't have it.

CHARLOTTE RODEWALD Covid-19 Update #2 April 21st 2020 | Reconstructed Values

ATOMIC HEADACHES

MIMI OTTAVI

I've been getting headaches lately. There are plenty of reasons as to why. I switch between my glasses and contacts too often; I don't drink nearly enough water; I spend all day, every day, looking at a screen. It makes sense for me to get headaches, and yet I do nothing to fix them. All I do is take Tylenol, close my eyes, and pray the pain goes away.

That's what I've been doing with a lot of things lately.

Closing my eyes and praying it all goes away.

It's a natural response — a natural reaction to just hope instead of do. When people are scared, it's said that they either go into a fight or flight response. I think there's a third response that's rarely talked about, and that's freeze. Everyone on planet Earth is stuck in that phase now, it seems. Scared so stiff that their bones won't move, that their synapses won't fire.

But I have to believe that, eventually, we'll all thaw. That our joints will loosen and the ice in our chests will melt and things will be warm again.

THINGS I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD MISS

EMILY SMITH

Here is a list of things I never thought I would miss:

Sitting in a restaurant to eat.

Feeling comfortable in a grocery store.

Not having to answer the question, "Do you have toilet paper?"

A million times a day at work.

Lingering in book stores, fingering my way through stories I will always be tempted to buy.

Letting strangers pet my dog.

Holding my baby nephew, born right before all of this happened.

Seeing my family.

Being on campus studying, observing all the groups of friends studying *within* six feet of each other.

Not considering going to work as getting out of the house.

There is more to this list. I am lucky enough to have job security, but also unlucky at having job security. I am lucky enough to be healthy. I hope you all are, too.

FAMILIARITY IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

On Friday March 13th, 2020 I left Clarke University and headed to my home state of Wisconsin for spring break like I had done for the previous three years. During my spring breaks I pursue one of my greatest passions in life... fishing. Little did I know that I would not be returning to Clarke from this normal one-week fishing trip.

At first, I was caught in a mix of emotions. I was upset that I would not be able to experience the rest of my senior year like numerous students have in years before me. I was nervous about finishing the semester and finding a job like I had been working on. However, I never lost my faith in Clarke University, I knew the decisions they were making were for the best.

I now had to face reality and finish my toughest semester at Clarke so far, online. But I knew in these new times of uncertainty caused by a worldwide pandemic, I had some familiarity on my side. Deep down I knew I still had the support of my friends and family, the support of the wonderful faculty at Clarke, and still had my lifelong stress reliever of fishing (with some added social distancing) by my side.

DEREK ZIEHME



EMILY BOGE

Today marks the beginning of week six of my quarantine experience. It is very hard to believe that much time has passed.

Some days are good, some are not so great. Thankfully, more days have been good rather than not. I am beginning to develop a daily routine—get up, do homework, eat, exercise, lounge, do some more homework, eat, take a shower, lounge some more, go to bed. This has helped me stay somewhat sane.

At first, quarantine made me angry and sad. I didn't want to stay at my house all the time. More importantly, I missed my friends and my school. Don't get me wrong-I still miss all of those things terribly. There are many things about this situation that I wish were better. However, in a global pandemic, it makes sense why these things are happening. Staying in quarantine, although not an ideal situation, has made me create memories with my family that will last a lifetime. I will never forget my dad telling me, while weeding the garden, about that one time in

elementary school when he played the song "Tragedy" by the Bee Gees for a sort of showand-tell. I will never forget the conversations my mom and I have on our daily walks while taking breaks from our laptops. I will never forget when my brother finally taught me how to play Fortnite and how we got a victory royale on our first match together (no thanks to me, that's for sure!).

Although we get on each other's nerves sometimes, quarantine has given my family the opportunity to have game nights and family dinners that we weren't able to have that often before. As I said before, there have been many tough times during this pandemic, but I will still cherish these small moments forever.



So as the school year winds down and I am stuck even longer in my house, I've tried to find the pretty things. Y'know, the yellow dandelions outside (which are technically weeds, but I don't care), the clouds pink from a sunset, the ASMR of a rainy day. The nice little things.

I enjoyed these things before. I would often go out of my way to get a good picture of a sunset. But now, as stress starts to really get to me, I find myself looking harder for these things. Just the other day, I went on a walk just so I could take pictures of the sunset.

I think, in times like these, finding small things nearby to make you smile is really nice. It brings peace of mind and lets me not think about the twelve things that may or may not be stressing me out.

Here's some recent pictures I've taken, with a little reminder. Let's keep finding peace in the little things, shall we?



People often joke that retail therapy is relaxing. Shopping the aisles of your favorite store and buying cute little knick-knacks that you'll use for a day then toss aside. Well, people are still doing this during their mandatory quarantine, maybe even more now than before. As someone who works in an "essential store," STAY THE F*** HOME. As you bring in your families to meet other friends in our Patio/Garden area, you are putting US at risk. "US" meaning the workers who are forced to continue to risk our health and safety. While you drink your coffee and laugh (without a face-mask), my coworker holds their breath as they walk past you.



EMILY SMITH

Many of my coworkers live paycheck to paycheck, not able to take time off. These same coworkers have significant others at home with many pre-existing conditions to the point that my coworkers must strip and shower each time they come home from the public. While you criticize me for asking you to stand behind our Plexiglas defenders because you can't hear as well for our 30-second interaction, I am keeping my cashiers in mind; remembering that one had lung-cancer, two have significant others with health conditions, one is pregnant, another has young children at home, etc. As you make your \$3.67 return, saying you "might as well walk around now that I am here," I pray your insensitivity and boredom don't kill any of my coworkers. I understand we live in the Midwest, it isn't as severe here as New York or Seattle, Washington, but it still affects us. But I am asking YOU to understand that half our employee count is at home to stay safe, we are short-staffed, paid WAY too little, and (honestly) don't care about your returns or purchases.

We just care if we or our loved ones will get out of this alive.



Faux Finals Week

Today is the first day of finals week. During a normal semester, this week I would be awake by 6:00am and at Clarke by 8:00am every day. During a normal semester, this week would be full of in-class presentations, crucial discussions about papers that have been written, and the taking of countless exams.

Today, I woke up at 8, convinced myself to get in the shower at 9, and started working on random assignments at 10. Don't get me wrong—I still have a lot of things that are due. I have to start (and finish) three papers, take two exams, and finish a makeshift presentation. Since I am home, though, my brain is convinced that school really isn't a big deal, and I don't have to worry about these things. As my list of things to do is definitely not something that can be finished quickly, you can see how this can be a little problematic for me.

Maybe there is an upside to this, though. With an in-class finals week, there was a lot of anxiety that came with it. There would be times that I would spend over 12 hours a day on campus working on homework and doing random tasks for school. This wouldn't be so bad if I wasn't a commuter student and I was just hanging out with friends instead of doing work! During a normal finals week, I would be getting minimal hours of sleep each night. During a normal finals week, I would eat only one stable meal a day.



During this faux-feeling finals week, I have developed a more stable schedule for myself and have worried about much less than normal. So, maybe that is an upside.

> EMILY BOGE May 3rd, 2020

AN UNEXPECTED Homecoming

DEREK ZIEHME

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many struggles for myself and my family. The biggest struggle has been balancing family life and school. During a normal college semester, I am living in Dubuque far away from my family in Wisconsin. However, with the pandemic I was forced to return home and renovate my family's living room into my new office space. The schoolwork was hard as I had expected, but that was not the biggest challenge I faced.

The greatest challenge I have faced during this Pandemic is continuing to be a successful college student while trying to ensure my family that their lives will return to normal after the Pandemic. My Mother works at a bar and restaurant that was forced to close and only provide carryout meals. Her normal 30-40-hour work weeks were now reduced to 5-10-hour work weeks. It has been hard watching her worry about not only financial aspects but the well-being of her normal customers too. Luckily, my Father has been able to continue his job of bridge construction. Many times, my family members have approached me asking what they should be doing to best deal with the current circumstances. Sadly I have had to respond with the answer "I don't know" many times.

Returning to home and being a functioning college student has been an enormous task. But I am thankful that all my family members and friends have been safe during this time. I can only assure my family members that this situation will get better, and in the meantime, we must control what we can and allow everything else to sort itself out.

HEY COACH, PUT ME IN!

MIMI OTTAVI

This period of isolation has turned me into a ghost, though that's not necessarily a bad thing. After all, Casper was quite friendly and Bloody Mary can sometimes serves as the (after) life of the party. Some days, I feel invisible. I look at myself in the mirror and my eyes pass right through my skin, pale and tired in the glass. Other days I'm a disturbance, haunting the hallways and pushing and pulling at my siblings, my parents, my surroundings. I'll push over books and open doors just to find something to do.

Other days, I just exist. I float around my home, feet barely touching the floor as I stand, stare, and sway between worlds.

This period of history is a purgatory— not heaven, not hell. Something in-between.

Around me, I see my family try their hat at normalcy. My dad works, as does my brother. My mother makes bread while my sisters continue school. In two days, I will be a graduate. I don't start my career until the beginning of June. Those weeks in the interim are when my body will truly fade away, where my soul will rip its seams from my skeleton.

I have to wonder what life will be like when all of this is over. Will I become human again or will I be too scared to stray from the familiar haunt of my four walls? Will I watch the other people in my house drift in and out of doors, stable in the world of the living while I watch through windows, yearning for some kind of heartbeat?

Things are changing and I am the most ready, yet the most afraid I have ever been. I've completed four years of school and will become a professional by next month. I've done all I can to be dependable, even in my spectral state. I feel the rotation of the Earth, I see the sun peeking out from behind the gnarled silhouettes of the trees. The world is an open wound, ready and waiting to be healed. I am salt, ready and waiting to be part of the healing.

These are our endings, as well as our beginnings.

Can you take a look at me and say take my hand, this is the only way.

We've both heard it all before but I feel something happening again. Hey coach, I'm ready, put me in.

> -Big Bad Wolf, Shakey Graves

HANNAH INGLES

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Pomp and Circumstance runs through my head as I work towards an end goal that doesn't seem definite. We keep working and eventually the work will run out. We may receive a congratulatory email but then what? We receive our diplomas in the mail but no ending, no finale. Just done. Four years of our life we will celebrate eventually but for now has an open end. We are the class of Corona.



CHARLOTTE RODEWALD Covid-19 Update #3 / May 14th 2020 | Familarity + Uncertainty

> I'm a guest for 20 days. I cough and hack uncontrolled. Paranoid eyes swung my way. Familial alarm unfold... They trap me in the guest room. Sterile sheets, cold to my touch; White walls, quiet as a tomb; I miss their chaos so much. Faint footsteps thump above me. I hear laughter through the vents, Muffled freedom, love, and glee! Isolation their defense. Mom yells "Hello" through the door; Masked to check my temperature. Couldn't see the smile she wore, Which is the mask I wonder. An erratic fever came. The cough, sore throat, got and left. New symptoms each day all claim control, my own grip bereft. In the end the fever died, My fogged mind released from steam, Safe to say I can confide, Sleep and me make a good team. My family welcomed me back. The sun I could feel again And for all missed chores and slack, I did make up for it then. I really did miss them all, The dog chases and laughter; So glad amidst the squall, ...dismiss missing calm after.



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