Behind the Mask:
40 Quarantine Poems from Humboldt County

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All works contained in this volume remain the property of the authors who wrote them.
This poetry collection is dedicated to our neighbors and community members who have passed from COVID-19. May your numbers remain few, and your memories live long.
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The lion is a god. The virus is a god.
We’re going to the woods to pray.
-Jerry Martien from “Prayer”
Refugee

Lsara Firefox Allen

You are in
your distant, sparkly, smelly city
celebrating
your six-month anniversary
during Shelter in Place
and you are sad

We never stop being
parents
and I wish I could change
all this
for you

“All this,” I say,
and imagine I am waving my hands around
gesticulating wildly
at the very air
we breathe

You are out there in that shiny city air
and I wish I could change the fact that
global warming
and pandemics
are the cold war
of your generation

Except now the war
is heating up
and global warming brings nightmares
larger than a mushroom cloud

we are already
climate refugees
home no longer exists
it has been eaten
by fire
Raptured
Robert Allen

The rider came frenzied
on a pale horse and
his name was
pestilence.
Other
riders, held for
a moment, then
flung the deathly
themselves
back to other
violences.
This is what it comes to,
what fear is;
a white horse, a
disease, and, alone,
the way the fury of the long night comes on.
The morning of April 7th after COVID-19

Greg Bee

I drive to the North Jetty at 2:04am PDT. I can’t sleep. I have a perfectly good “shelter,” but the “in place” part is something I’ve never been able to figure out.

I come to this same spot on the Jetty when I feel unsure of what to do next. No matter what is going on with me, or the world, this place stays the same. The ocean is always there. It makes the same sounds, I watch the same crash.

(When the day comes that I drive to this spot, and the ocean is gone, that’s when I’ll know we can just say, “fuck it,” and be done with the whole thing!)

Right now the tide is rough. Humboldt overcast covers every star in the sky. This is literally what I’m seeing, not a metaphor for hard times or uncertainty in the future, although it would be a good one.

Maybe this place knows how to make its own metaphors.

Maybe this world knows what to do without us. Maybe it will be just fine when we’re gone. Maybe right now, all we need to do is listen to the waves as they crash, cook Sunday dinner and tell the people in our lives that we love them.

Shelter in a way that doesn’t say, “I’m afraid,” in a place where you’d rather say, “I’m trying the best I can,” instead of, “I’m sorry, I didn’t know what I was doing.”

At 2:31am PDT I wonder if I can sit here until the sun
comes up over the ocean. I wonder if I could sit here with you on a blanket until 6:49am like that time we did in Asbury Park, we counted 7 shooting stars that we BOTH saw, I knew that if I just held you there a little longer it would make everything better but YOU said, “We should get going.” I know that no matter how hard I try you will not sit here with me, no matter how hard I try the sun will not rise over the Pacific Ocean. But I still wonder.

(In that last part, I started sounding like Buddy Wakefield at the end of Convenience Stores in my head a little, it was unintentional, read it again if you didn’t hear it.)

At 2:42am PDT I think about how tragic it would be if I didn’t take off my shoes and socks and dip my feet in the water. How tragic it would be if I didn’t feel the wet sand between my toes the last time I ever came to the North Jetty to think things over.

So I take them off,
once by one
and run off to dip them in,
And as I get closer to the water it feels like the ocean is receding,
with every step the water is somehow farther away.
I run faster and I am so scared that there is a tsunami waiting to crash down around me.
I’m scared that god is hiding there.
Neither Omnipotent nor Benevolent,
just hiding there,
the way cowards do.
My feet feel a beautiful splash of water and I rejoice!

I let the moment pass without acknowledging it.
I turn around and start sprinting back to my car. I don’t know if I’m running away from a Tsunami or god or Humboldt County, The love of my life or lifetime of regrets.

Maybe I just love to run.

Maybe it feels good to move my body this way after spending the day in bed, and after however many weeks we’ve been living this way. Maybe viruses aren’t the only things that want to spread.

Maybe it’s okay to love the run and at 3:08am PDT I can confidently say that it doesn’t have to be towards, or away from, anything. It can just be on the beach, for fun, to make you feel something other than boring.

To let you know the things you want are always there, even when it’s raining or cold, or you just don't feel like going.
The Fallowing
Michael Bickford

(with acknowledgements to Billie Holiday & Abel Meeropol)

These fallowed fields frame our time,
the structure of our soil
redefined untilled,
until the flood we know will come.

Well-worked before the blight,
we test its tilth in silent streets
quiescent public spaces.
But the abandonment is hollow
only surface-bare, the buildings bleed
so thick they are with life and longing.

Still we shelter in our private places:
the flesh retreats to salty sallow bones
of sickness and regret. In desperation
we borrow the youth of our children’s lives,
secretly reverse our parents’ mortgage,
and pawn grandparents’ legacy for booze.
All to justify, preserve the privileged past.
The bill is due.

Ironic elect-ronic comics co-mix on the air,
 virus protection severed at the head,
logic circuits shorted-out with hairspray,
spurring minions on to armed denial:
Open up! Damn the data! Full speed ahead!
Yo! Gallows crooners! Sing to the gallery!
Appeal for more applause as trapdoors drop
and body-bags of new Strange Fruit are hanged
from pure white yardarms of The Good Ship Hope,
its red double-crosses spawning tent-morgues.
Embalmed.
Becalmed.
Fallowed.

Now the fever fills the lungs and shallow,
intubated breathing clings to life.
We cultivate, we culturate,
evacuate occult blood from our bowels
as all around us human tallow drips
and draws the sea-salt sorrow from our eyes.

Ground-fog rises to lowering sea-clouds,
the vampire mist is brighter than their slate
as dawn-light splits the air from darkened hills,
grey rainbows wet the backs of fatted calves:
the morning comes, yet no one wakes.
We sleep.
Fallowed.

These naked fields will in time be fecund.
Weeds that we call crops will intercede.
Though oceans we pretend to rule are beckoned
by our fires to salt the seeded shore,
the earth below, slow burning, will explode.

Our culture is at work at home
the culture of the loam
the tunnels of the worms
the nematodes of joy
the nodes of nitro-fixing germs
we till to live we live until, untilled,
we fallow.
How will the callow children of this night begin to find their hallows of delight?
Weathering the Storm
Stephanie Bigham

Like the rain they fell.
And those inside watched
Through windows blurred
Helpless to catch the falling.

Like the rain they fell.
And those inside stayed for fear
That to breathe, to touch, to reach out into the rain
Would sweep them into the torrent.

Like the rain they fell.
To be a raindrop measured by a scientist, by a number—
Not a name, as they joined the masses
Someone's loved ones all and none.

Like the rain they fell.
And in our hearts, the rain of tears is falling still.
Sadness, anger, hollowness, fear
Precipitated by the invisible rainmaker as it leads us into the unknown.

But like the rain our love
Can be the rainbow in someone's sky.
No mask can hide the sunny gaze of smiling eyes or kind hello
That reminds us that someday we will have clear skies again.
No More Doing to be Done

Laurie Birdsong

Life takes longer
when you walk
on the border of green things
  you notice the shallow gutter
    full of trash, the hillside
      white with daisies
the blue blue sky
curious with clouds

Life takes longer when you walk
your breath slows
to the pace of your heels
tap tapping down
your arms swing
  with graceful helix’
everything spirals around you

Life takes longer when you walk
on asphalt, through city streets
hard and empty, till long
you reach the earth worn path
  out into the field
    where hawk is stanchion
      on the high wire
chickadees flirt and blush
  through the branches
    and the sky widens
      the length of your dreams

Life takes longer when you walk
home, the mailbox is empty
there is no more doing
to be done
no more sharpening the blade
   across the wet stone
       no more filling the gas tank
for the third time this month

no more doing to be done
we simply walk
   and walk
       and walk on
till the roar of crickets
   and the pulse of your breath
       resound in the twilight
**White Fog**  
*Susan Bloch-Welliver*

We walked by the bay enveloped in fog.  
Its giant net caught walkers with dogs,  
drifted on bikes, cement sculptures,  
couples who stared at its milky haze.

Our hands held tight, sheltered by white;  
we could be ghosts,blanketed in sky, in dense bright white.

Gulls fluttered above, barely there, lost in light.

A ping of metal disturbed the quiet  
paws crossed water/ raced home/  
tan tail waved.

We talked, dreamed, told stories where we learn from this,  
walked in a whiteness so bright, each separated, shapeless  
light with no shadow  
bright without sun  
on a trail by the bay;  
relieved by water—air,  
umbrellaed in fog  
shielded by masks  
safe by distance  
counted in feet,

alone in our dramas,  
together this day.
Virulent
Sarah Brooks

Release the innocent
from their prisons
Sideline the players
and cast out the naysayers

Infect the unbelievers
Inject the economy
with the beleaguered, but
the rations will be meager

The thing that sets
Us humans apart
To have vision and prepare—
Or wait for tragedy to start

A lack of imagination
(necessary for compassion)
Could be the fatal flaw
In our reaction
Personal neuroses and pandemic
Wendy Butler

There is no time to obsessively self-reflect
People are dying
There is only time
Why didn’t I say that?
Have you got it did you recover?
Why did I do that and what can it mean?
Don’t get too close
I wish I could perfect connect
No listen
Re-emerge, replenish, reconstruct
Time will tell
Time won’t tell anything
In The Shadow Of Waiting

Daryl Ngee Chinn

Chinese have an expression for impatience,
Dog can’t hold it in, dog can’t wait.

We are waiting
to take off our masks
to staunch the flood
of new words. We don’t want
to practice social distancing,
to comprehend Kawasaki Syndrome, hear about ventilators,
surgical and N95 mask shortages,
intubation, negative pressure,
we are waiting.

We are waiting to topple the crown
of the new king, SARS-CoV-2,
COVID-19, hoping we can stop a virus
like Ebola, Dengue, bubonic plague,
like AIDS—how that sounds like a bandage.

Every day we see or read about
something new and something old
—a marriage, til death do us part,
of the heart, the kidneys, the lungs,
the blood, the clots, the fevers,
diarrhea, the liver, bloodshot eyes,
the loss of taste and sense of smell,
atom-smashed and stir-fried together

with the invisible ink
of people with no symptoms,
negative tests, no breathlessness,
who walk by and then drop dead.
We are waiting, and afraid,
Like Oedipus, who wanted,
in the end, to know it all,
to demand truth, whole truth,
truth soon enough.

We are waiting, waiting for plasma,
for throat and blood tests, for vaccines,
because they are all we know,
which feels like nothing.

We are all waiting
for the numbers to subside,
for the extra hospitals to go away,
we are waiting to breathe, to exhale
for the arc of health to rise.
We are waiting inside.
Spring is here. The air
has changed. Are we done?

We are waiting
for a cure. We are fighting
this perfect disease,
one that changes
with each discovery,
this pandemic.
We are fighting this war
against which we have no
known weapons.
It is not something we see,
we are waiting, because
there is no medicine,
no gun, no bomb,
we are throwing darts
at a tank, berries are ripening,
poppies blooming, not waiting.

it is almost hopeless
except for the Samaritans,
the nurses, doctors, aides, 
cleaners, therapists, janitors, 
those who flew toward the infected, 
toward the unfair battle, 
dressed against the invisible, 
attending to the dying, staying 
with those who die alone, 

we are waiting for the morticians 
who took and stacked up the dead, 
making space where there was none, 
worked and worked to bury, to cremate. 
We saw, we see, 
and we are waiting, 
careful in our homes.

We are waiting and watching 
the ones who blame and threaten, 
the ones with guns and bullhorns 
who, like all of us, are not used to 
listening and sacrificing 
for the greater good, 
for the public’s health, 
we, us, each of us all.

We are waiting 
to shake hands, to kiss, 
we are waiting to touch 
granddaughters, we are waiting 
to tackle, arm wrestle, 
to love our enemies, 
to sleep with one another.

We are waiting for those 
to admit they were wrong, 
that they didn’t know it all, 
we are waiting for someone 
to stop insulting the questioner, 
we are waiting to stop blaming
the Chinese, the Korean, the Japanese, but it is hard to wait without blaming, to admit the virus traveled west and east and anywhere a plane or person went, Wuhan or Paris, Siberia, Buenos Aires, London, Shanghai, Marseille, it flew into everyone’s open arms, a conspiracy of travel deals, unintended migration of travel currents, sneezes, sea cruises, charter flights, airline deals, all-in-one resorts, Christmas shopping, New Year migrations.

We are waiting.
An Introvert Laments
Larry Crist

I long for the crowds i once abhorred,  
would avoid like the . . .  
In current pandemic parlance, steer clear of  
Nostalgic at present for Piccadilly Circus, or Chicago’s  
Rush & Division, Mother’s Bar on that same  
block where i once lived, jostled, coming and going  
all hours of night. The hustle bustle of Times Square  
or Philadelphia’s Broad Street, the bars and theatres,  
the throngs of humanity that’d force you off the walk  
Philly’s Italian Market where you’d drift like a boat  
amidst the people-packed current  
Cheek by jowl in the subways of London, the shops  
on Oxford St., where you’d best know where  
you’re going or get swept up in the . . .

The crowd—it’s own animal—an animal’s animal,  
a swollen beast with multiple backs, out of mind  
without feeling, a mob or riot, standing in line,  
camped-out for one of those big stadium concerts  
—a Bill Graham presents or mega sporting event,  
exhilarating, possibly life threatening, everyone  
on their feet, screaming, stomping, chanting, demanding

A deafening hive-mind yelling themselves hoarse,  
at the top of their uninfected lungs, arms raised  
as if victory were imminent, like a collective force  
that would rattle the cosmos, reduce this unleashed  
populous in terrifying singularity

Predatory birds maintain distance, beyond the pale, way  
past the orange, firmly ensconced in the pink or on the green
Hoi polloi placed here within, a thing distinctly human, dissipating like gas, smoke or shattered crystal, stirred ashes a swirl, ALL FALL DOWN, wandering ghost cities throughout the Loserverse, dispersing over and upon the Monoverse, drifting past planet ME, onward ho onto solo singularity where infinitesimal granules orbit dead satellites, dissipating into loneliness unimaginable infinite entropy forever
**Meet me on the corner**  
*Dylan Collins*

Most days  
I try to believe  
that people are inherently good

despite the evidence,

despite every moment I have  
swallowed the opposite

with a chaser of denial.

But today you met me on the corner  
of I wish a mothafucka would  
And today is a beautiful day  
To cuss a mothafucka out  
Tuesday O’ clock.

Today I am sending a complete  
unabridged user’s guide  
to just who the fuck  
do you  
think  
I am

to your mailbox  
for every time you mistook  
my kindness for weakness.

Today I’m sending a flock of mountain dew stains  
mixed with the patches in Post Malone’s crusty ass beard hair  
onto the lips of every bro  
who thinks no  
means try a little harder,  
try another approach.  
It will be a warning shot  
Because if you push,
touch,
try a little harder,
see the red dot on your forehead,
back the fuck up,
tread
So lightly that you disappear
into the definition
of consent.

Today I’m sending the dirt from every grave
of the bodies of essential workers,
healthcare employees and our elders
inside an envelope with
A $1,200 check of our own money
the government asked us
to beg for
to each CEO
that stacked their billions
while we died
when they told us to stay home

Shelter in place,
when the only shelter
you truly have in this country is
the cover of currency.

Today I am sending my body
as cover
to Minneapolis,

I am sending my voice as a weapon to the corrupt
Humboldt County Justice System
and D.A. Maggie Fleming

I am sending a death threat inside a megaphone
to every cop who can’t hear
“I Can’t Breathe”

And a giant flaming bag of dog shit
to the porch of anyone who wants to step on the voices of persecuted people to interject “But All Lives Matter”

Currently I’m at a level of burning this bullshit to the ground based on things I can’t even speak on With the feeling of helpless in the eye of this hurricane. Tomorrow I might resume believing humans are inherently good because it hurts my soul too hard not to, But if you believe these hands will not Square up to protect myself and those I love Even on those hopeful days Don’t forget what I told you On the corner of I wish a mothafucka would And today is a beautiful day to cuss a mothafucka out Tuesday O’Clock.
April 18, 2020

Therese FitzMaurice

The fog is smothering the coastline
reaching into the valley,
over the first ridge.
The children are still in bed.

It feels like the right time to cry.
Today’s NYTimes briefing
mentions mass morgues
for nursing home patients,
families overwhelmed with care,
children struck by rising poverty,
the mental health impacts of isolation.

The local economy reports 15 business
have permanently closed,
the first in many waves to come.
The Humboldt agency spokeshead says,
the economy is more than the numbers
it’s the story we tell about it.
He’s hopeful the Nordic land-based
salmon farm will bring 100 new jobs
from the east coast company.

I want more than anything
to curl up in my father’s lap
like a child and cry,
let his strong hands
rock away all my sorrow.

He’s asked us yesterday to cancel
our summer flight to see them.
There were years where I would’ve celebrated
that freedom, released from the obligation of family.

Now I wonder when I will see them again?
If my mother’s fragile lungs will be spared.
If my step-mother’s radical, stoic strength will keep her from one of the mass graves.

My son is tired of me asking how he’s doing
My daughter has begun to say, she needs to see her people. I can no longer be the center of their orbit.

Last night at dinner, they asked why we had gone to Jamaica.
We told them stories about the three international trips we took before they were born.

The reggae concert in Montego Bay.
The cenotes and ancient Mayan ruins in Tulum, the stunning architecture in Rome.

I wonder when we will travel again beyond the small radius of our home.
The fog is so thick today, we can no longer see the ocean from our second story window.

There is a candle lit on the altar.

This morning I asked aloud, for the spirits of the river and the Earth of the wise ancestors to help me, to heal me, so that I may be a presence of love through these gray and mysterious days.
The Trouble with Pibbles

James Floss

Klaxons rang and
Alarums sounded

Front door whooshed
Protocols defied

Airlock unleashed
Lockdown defiled

“It's Henri!” Jean cried!
“He’s outside!”

Gamboling over
Grass still green

I suited and embarked
Gathered him in my arms

We tumbled into the inward
The iris clanged shut

Disinfectant sprayed
Protocols reframed

“He!ri!” I shouted!
“What were you thinking?”

“Look! It’s Mr. Pibbles!”
His hands declenched

Revealing Mr. Pibbles
“I saw him outside

And I knew it was OK;
Now can we go out and play?”
POET’S NOTE: NO. DON’T. STOP. SOME WILL. HOPE YOU WON’T. MASKS/DISTANCE STILL. STOP. PATIENCE STILL VIRTUE. STOP.
– COMMON SENSE.

========================================================================
Do What You Love
Mariana Franco

Entering Venice beach
your old childhood adolescent stomping grounds.
20 years later, the bio-luminescence has come
paying a visit on the southern Pacific Ocean shores.
Parked on Washington street by the canals,
taking a detour behind the alleyways
remembering us walking there when we first began
our courting of one another.
Walking past the Venice canals, Baja Cantina restaurant,
where we had stopped, admiring at how the sun that day
was reflecting off the water its golden orange rays.
Walking past Kifunes Japanese restaurant and sushi bar,
where you for a whole year, your virgin tongue tasted
different cuts and rolls of fish and Japanese delights
as a kid. Your mother couldn't cook that year; she never
got over the death and loss of your father. And you,
probably never have either. You took me to Kifunes
and we tried their famous big clam dish you raved
about. But Kifunes is boarded up, lost
in the darkness of night, in the background. I wonder,
will it exist after the pandemic?
Walking toward the pier, but not stepping onto its path,
I walk on the sand of the beach. Walking towards the illuminating
waves crashing onto the shore.
I am happy.
For an hour and a half only small glimpsed thoughts of you
disrupt but do not cloud over the beauty of the sea. I almost
forget that Covid-19 is reality. The lightning flashes of blue,
periwinkle-turquoise hues drowned in white waves,
is too beautiful and miraculous to be overshadowed
with thoughts of you or the virus. My eyes,
my body, my senses are blessed with this gift
from mother Ocean from great goddess Earth.
She is beautiful in all her glory.
I am grateful, I am thankful for the cold ocean air
hitting my face and body. Slightly chilly, a little cold
and nonetheless happy.
I'm alive.
Smell of dead fish or something ripely smelling of decay, is not so bad.
Keeping me captured in this moment, enamored and hypnotized by the sea and all her magik. I wonder, if you ever walked this particular part of the beach with your own feet. And I am here now, cannot reminisce of your past that you shared with me or think of the experiences we shared together.
I am here now.
I am here experiencing my life and these moments in Los Angeles.
I am making Venice my own.
No more crossroads of Washington and Wade with you in the driver seat.
I am behind the wheel.
Take a look at me now.
I'm driving away seeing the signs that open up my eyes
In bold blue letters, it is the Ocean saying to me, calling me in letting you go for something greater,
"Do what you love."
And I am blessed, releasing myself and you from exhausted expectations.
I release you.
I am free.
Rehearsal May Be Over

Quarantine Poem #7
Anne Fricke

While digging up blackberry vines from the chicken coop,
   I thought of my great grandfather, the crooked house with the tall, chiming clock, gloriously red tomatoes hanging heavy on vines, and berry bushes ripe with sweetness lining the fence,
I thought also of the people I fed in the nursing home as a teenager, their lives dwindling from years of use, unforgotten stories carried on hunched shoulders, snacks of saltines and buttermilk (their favorite) a shadowed memory from younger, leaner years
I clipped and slashed at the thick, spiny arms weaving through cherry-blossomed branches, scratching red lines into my flesh as I cleared the space with a growing Depression-era anxiety

I would have made a good pioneer woman
   strong hands, broad shoulders and skin that browns in the sun

I’ve dug garden beds on the side of rocky slopes, removed stones in piles like my Gaelic ancestors to create rivulets of fertile ground
   bathed children and clothing in buckets of cold river water
   eaten meals solely of food grown or fished by my husband and me
   made medicine with the plants who grow here by choice

I have played the part of the frontier survivor—in the comfort of modern civilization and roads that lead to town
   but now the future feels uncertain

our survival is not a given

we are fixing the fence of the chicken coop, cleaning out their space so they have a secure place to lay—free range is hip

38
if you have store bought eggs to fill in the gaps of your hens’ freedom
we are planting seeds to feed a small community—who knows what friends may have the need?
we are gathering medicine into pots upon the porch—there may not always be a tincture for what ails us
we are dusting off our homesteading books, refreshing our memories of the local plants, stuffing cabbage and salt into crocks to learn new sources of nutrition

This no longer feels like a weekend retreat, or what I yearned for in my youth, this no longer feels like a lifestyle,

it’s beginning to feel like survival
Alone in Quarantine

Susanna Gallisdorfer

I miss touch

not the touch of today’s spring wind
sure and strong off the ocean
sending bird flight careening,
hurrying through grass all rushed
and flushed in silver,
whipping hair upward like flames
in a brushfire,

not that kind of touch.

I miss the way a hand
can open to another,
fingers soft like a wing
gently unfolding,
palm cushioned and warm,
its heart line shaped in the womb,
how a hand can tenderly send
a gesture, a caress, a comfort
across separation to join
in oneness,
if only as a handshake.
Blame
Margot Genger

The anti-enlightenment, a cage, a trap.
The Hatfields and McCoys have nothing on us.
We sew poison, throw bombs that ricochet
off walls cast in cement.

Blame China
Blame the World Health Organization
Blame Obama.

Fight back.
But how? Blame?
What else is there?
Love isn't working.

Blame Trump.
Child, narcissist, liar, mentally ill.
90,000 dead. 60,000 his fault.
Of course! Perfect attack.

But what if we said nothing?
Or if we shot him?
And they shot and we shot.
Would the blame end?

Disease is now political.
Hugs falls into a right or a wrong.
The pandemic infects our bigotry.
It's an exponential, visual, soul sickness.
We cannot look at ourselves.
We cannot look away.

So...
Let's blame the ancestors.
The white ones.
Those selfish, self-righteous
"If you can get it you can have it"

41
founders of an upstart democracy
where black people served white ones
so as not to be whipped or worse.

240 years later,
while brown people get deported,
more and more black people get shot
so the lily white can spend
all those greenbacks
regardless of the land, the air, the water,
regardless of morality, kindness, generosity, life.

Now though,
we've got a pandemic.
white is pit against white.
A deadly proposition.
Devoid of compromise,
harmony a pipedream,
the stakes so high.

Watch out all you black folk,
brown folk, old folk, women folk.
Whitey is afraid.
He's gonna' blame you,
and I blame him.

I turn off the news,
write this poem that will change no one
write another one about the good
in the world
where ever it is
that I so hope
will prevail.
I don't know
what to write down anymore.
I cannot seem
to leave it behind me
or put it down
or scrub hard enough
or often enough
to make the seams match up again.
Dreams about the virus
and my sick patients
and in my dreams
I can do nothing to help them.
I can do nothing to help them.
Most of the time
I can not tell
if I have slept
or if I am driving.
Work is never done.
There are so many of us
who have it worse than I do.
I read every day
it is not enough.
We are not enough.
They are stronger than I am,
they say "I got this"
before they kiss their kids goodnight
before they wash their hands
before they get sick
before they don't say words anymore
there's too many people
that are going to die.
They'll be alone.

It is illegal to mourn in this country.
Illegal to mourn this country.
Someone said I was
the beating heart of our practice.
That was a long time ago
and lately I fantasize about
how best to cut out
my beating heart.
I could give it away.
I could stop
making friends with my patients.
I could swallow whole
my heart.
I have gained weight. I eat
as if I burn calories.
As if my heart races
for good reasons. I eat
so I feel heartburn while I lay awake.
So I can feel my fullness for hours.
At least it is something.
I don't understand
how we are not all suicidal.
My patients are not supposed
to hurt like this.
They are not supposed
to be sick getting sicker.
They are not supposed
to all be sick together.
I am not that kind of nurse.
I do not know how to do this job.
I do not know where the lines are.
I can not keep inside of them.
I cannot keep them safe.
I cannot work this out
so we are ok
and that used to be what I was good at.

Now I am not able to be
used anywhere, I am told.
I am told my set of skills is useless.
I cannot make sense of this.
I read there is not enough.
There is no light.
There is no "when this is all over…"
there is only my heart burning.
There is only my one foot
in front of the other foot.
There is only a countdown
until my friends are dead.
I see this virus everywhere.
cherry sutra
Karen Harris, M.Div.

It was Jesus who looked into a field
Where blooming lilies wise lessons did yield
Today it was my turn, standing under a tree
To receive gentle instruction on how to be

While taking a sunlit morning walk
Dogs for company, no need to talk
Blessed by silence, I was free to see
The beauty of a cherry tree

I stood still beneath her, feet firm on the ground
Not restless, distracted, or running around
The thought came: She knows how to shelter in place
And she shelters others within her embrace

My eyes and heart turned up toward her crown
Open to receive whatever might drift down
In that moment of quiet she poured into me
The simple wisdom of a cherry tree

Stand firm and strong in the place where you are
Create beauty and food from the light of a star
Spread your arms wide to give shelter and shade
To any who come, needing your aid

Her sweet lesson had already filled up my heart
But there is more, so much more, to her gentle art
Blossoms wreathed the sky like delicate lace
Petals swirled down to caress my face

In every direction the clear air danced
With twirling petals delicately romanced
Her love poured out to the world all around
She stood still in the center, not making a sound

It was Jesus who looked into a field
Where blooming lilies wise lessons did yield
Today it was my turn, standing under a tree
To receive gentle instruction on how to be
surrender
Kristy Hellum

every day
i get up
open the door
and walk through the hole
in my heart

opening to such beautiful sorrows
whether or not by choice
as natural
as breathing

to protect myself while feeling
such limitless despair
i must don a sacred headdress
in preparation for simply going
to the grocers or walking
through a farmers market
impossible to conceal

my road is paved
with vulnerability stones
to better fathom this path
requires that i walk alone
and far from myself
at times
it was
the only road
i could follow

one day we will all crumble
inevitably parents
will get their hearts broken
by their own children
even my own vocation cannot save me

so if i ask for guidance
i shall make this an invitation
sending it only to those
whose wisdom is
sourced from their
well-earned heartbreaks

every day
i get up
open the door
and walk through the hole
in my heart
standing in awe
arms outstretched
to greet the dawn.

In quarantine 4/20
Bord för En*  
*David Holper*

Please sit. This is your table. It stands rooted to the earth. Like the Galapagos where for centuries the flightless cormorant harbored. Without fear of predation. We too have one special today: safety. It comes with a side of sky, over the russet bed of a fallow field where we promise you will be left utterly alone. We will send over your meal via cable in a wicker basket. We place a little checkered cloth over it like the print from Dorothy’s dress in which she was swept far from any world she knew. What else is available? Sorry, we’re out of assurances. Yet even in the whirlwind, it is still the safest restaurant in the world. If when your food arrives, a sparrow alights, we would appreciate it if you offer her a little bread. A bit of water from your glass. She has come so far to be with you—and it takes so little to show you have not forgotten your humanity at home.

Bord för En* is a Swedish restaurant that was recently opened during the pandemic. The restaurant is a single table in a field, and the food is sent via a cable in a basket. Only one person per day is served.
Pandemic!

Ian Jewett

A cough and …
I am sick for the ages!
Nah, just allergies—just allergies
Pandemic! Pandemic! Ruling the pages

I mask
I hide—I shelter-in-place
I am gone—I am gone
Did I even leave a trace?

I am covered
You are covered
Whether we are sick or not
I can tell
Can you tell?
It is the connection we forgot
In your eyes turned away
and your head bent low
there’s a comfort in holding on
to all the love we can bestow

My home becomes an office
and my office becomes a home
Where do I go just to breathe?
Where do I go just to roam?

Will you tell me a story of your churned up soul?
I long to tell you a story of mine
There’s a yearning—always, pressing—yearning
for another kind of peaceable time

Maybe you can swim in your riches and chill
Maybe you live in unemployment and panic
Maybe your protests are ungrounded—steeped in dissonance
Either way, just listen to those politicking tongues running rampant
So a fever and an illness
noted in the story of human ages
Pandemic! Pandemic!
Ever-bearing down upon the pages
So, I. So, you. So, them. So, us.
We all take our place
on the grandest of stages.
Grieving Our Whole Family

Deborah Kearns

I am broken-hearted for the sick,
who say it’s like drowning.
I weep for the dying,
mourn for their families—
deprived of final moments together.

And I cannot forget the pangolin—
shy, harmless—world’s most trafficked animal,
COVID-19 carrier suspect #1,
along with the horseshoe bat.
Blameless mammals,
their torture begins
in a cramped cage.

Euphemistically called “wet markets,”
where their blood,
other bodily fluids and parts
flood the floors—
local customers and tourists abound.

“Wet markets,” where their limbs
are severed from their living bodies,
and sold piece-by-piece,
until finally they are slaughtered,
and whose suffering we share—once again,
with our loss of those we most loved.

Can we stop this now—
the mutilation, agony and prolonged death
of innocent wildlife?
We may have to save them
to save ourselves.
Psalm for Surreal Ceremony
Zev Levinson
—for Richard Stone, mayor of Piedmont Avenue, in the days of COVID-19

Long conversations as I always desired. There is time to talk and the people are lonely. They let words cascade as they piece together distant deaths and fear whispers beneath the tongue. I have always been a good listener and I like this unexpected light. Twenty-minute dialogues six feet apart in grocery stores, neighborhood walks. Though rural with houses on acres, we often chance upon one another, alternative exercise for lost workouts, and Doug stacking his firewood, Susan tending her streetside landscape, Ted at his endless lawnmower, familiar faces now with names. They are letting me in, so I recount today’s burial of Uncle Rick in Oakland. With my family in their faraway homes, all of us safe behind our cameras, I observed the handfuls of earth that began to deliver him back to loam, blanched at my cousins’, my attendant brother’s shattered passages. We will gather when the air is clear, long conversations sifting this reality and the love that remains.
Distancing
Jason M. Marak

Distance perches on dark cliffs above gnashing seas overlooking scattered eternity. Molted, cracked beak, dead eyes. But make no mistake, she sees. And she demands to be counted: feet, furlongs, meters, miles, six of one, half dozen of the other. Distance is distance, by definition, the space between: Point A, Point B. Bridge of Sighs, Caesars Palace pool. Lovers separated by ten steps across a crowded cocktail party or by the mysterious chasm of time. Makes no difference. Both spans measurable and felt. She's powerful. But here's the trick: She owns a weakness great as Achilles. You see, it's like they say, takes two to tango. No destination, no distance. No point of departure, same math. A magnet, one tick beyond attraction's elemental pull is no longer consumed by the tug. But at heart, electrons still hum, content with knowledge of the other.
Prayer

Jerry Martien

Spring, 2020

Neighbors up the ridge report a mountain lion prowling in their yard at night. It’s the logging over in Elk River, replies another. Driving out the animals. It’s not hard to understand. You push the wild. The wild pushes back. The virus is an animal driven from the woods.

We murdered the gods who looked after the forest. Then we built the gods a temple. Using trees for columns. Burning trees to make bronze. At first we went to the temple only to celebrate and pray. Then we’d all go home—except for a few priests to look after things. They built more temples. Let in the money changers, the brokerages and banks. Service workers and little dictators to run it all.

You see where this takes us. Why we find temples buried in desert sand. Decaying in jungles. I worry about the neighbors’ cats. The neighbors.

I’m sheltering in place today. The air is clear. No planes in the sky. Somewhere a pump is running. Another log truck going by. A couple of crows bringing news.

The lion is a god. The virus is a god. We’re going to the woods to pray.
Gaia’s Rage
Pat McCutcheon

I counted on you to be awestruck
at the Fibonacci sequence,
recognizing the same numbers in the petals
of a purple flower and structure of a pinecone,
or hearing a bird’s song repeating
my Morse Code, my cry for help, my S.O.S.,
but you were blind and deaf
to how everything is connected.
I was confident you’d have known
trees so welcoming it seems
they’ve grown all this time
just to feel the warmth of your hand on their trunks?
Was so sure you’d be dazzled
by full double rainbows streaking the sky.
would hear poetry in the canopies of forests,
the gentle roll of hills,
stories in creeks’ chuckling water,
a benediction in the kiss of sun.

But I was so damn wrong.
You assume it is all just for you alone,
run your fingers through the grass,
grab it in your fist, feel my pulse
echo in your blood—but then
dump tons of filthy waste into the primordial
waters of the oceans so great whales wash up dead,
their bodies crammed with plastic.
Thousands of orange-beaked tufted puffins
wash ashore killed by starvation—
fish they depend on decimated in waters
warmed by your demand for oil, gas
so greedy it has changed the climate.
Your endless dams and deforestation wipe out
the red-haired orangutan, your brother
with ninety-six percent of your DNA.
You have not respected the virgin beauty of the earth.
I have sent floods, tornadoes, earthquakes and wildfires
destroying homes, towns, your own kind,
but still you do not understand
the interconnectedness of all.
Perhaps a plague will capture your attention,
make you stop the fierce competitive haste that keeps you
from hearing our common breath, shared heartbeat.
A tiny worldwide virus for you, strong and deadly,
so easily shared—passed from a friend’s hug,
the sneeze of a passerby,
someone at work two weeks ago.
Maybe the wildfire in your body,
a fever burning your filled lungs, or
your wife’s cough becoming desperate
gasps for air from her, from your baby?
You may turn for comfort to my natural world,
as you have so often in the past
—but the sky is filled with your toxic smog,
rivers polluted, whole species vanished.
Maybe now you will know you
are as diseased as our precious planet.
Watch me show you how to slow down.
Stop! Listen now!
This Wasn't Supposed to be a Love Poem
Katherine Nunes-Siciliani

we share half a bottle of rum
your skilled fingers trace rims
with tangerine skin
a nod to the job that is no longer

a nod to why we are sharing a bottle of rum
on a Wednesday night
I say,
"here's to maintaining a sense of normality, right?"

it is late
or early, one could say
records spin alongside
the sound of your stories
we share worries
sometimes kisses
even though we're not supposed to
especially when we're not supposed to

with blissful eyes locked to mine
you say,
"we're doomed, aren't we?"
to love, you mean

"yes. yes we are."

\\

I am scared to love you
not because you are scary
or flighty
or dysfunctional

you are none of these things
quite the contrary, in fact
you show me safety is not a gift, it is a right
and you are anything but passive
in how you give and ask for consent

there is a fear of your safety,
and your simplicity makes my bones shake
maybe it's just the trauma speaking,
but isn't there supposed to be something wrong with you?

something for me to overthink
over-analyze
over-worry
aren't I supposed to doubt myself in your company,
just a little bit?
aren't I supposed to drown,
just a little bit?

In times of solitude I find myself searching
for reasons not to love you
but when we lie back to back
the sweet nothings I whisper to myself
as you sleep
say otherwise

give in
let it be what it is
let it be
simple

we make a home of your bed
the rum has made us giddy
and your laugh sings
alongside the records

You say, 'I love you.'
and, I, without missing a beat -
'I love you, completely.'
It was not inaccurate,
I just needed the liquid courage
It was true
I know because I remembered it all the next morning
and smiled as you slept

you told me you love me
and I did not drown

you are safe
and simple
and yes
yes, we are.
Latex Gloves
Vincent Peloso

One size fits most
does not fit me.

The latex rips.
The cashier smiles

at the shards
clinging to my hand

sweaty as the chilled glass
of homemade lemonade

I will pour at home
after washing and soaking

the produce I bought
in vinegar water

for twenty minutes
and hanging my knapsack on the line
to solarize.
But who am I kidding?

Though helpful, these precautions
don’t guarantee shit.

Most of us will eventually get it.
And a lot of us will die.

One size fits most.
If the glove rips,

don’t panic, don’t cry.
Wear whatever you want.
But remember the man standing before you in line.

All he wanted to buy was a candy bar.
I Startle Ospreys
Will Schmit

with my saxophone.
No urban legend,
I play for the abandoned lots of the Lord.

Industrial pampas
clusters promise bush fire
in the place of critical acclaim. Song sheets
the color of smokestacks turn.

Rehearsal, in Covid, is
a concerted effort to remember
angel bands in tandem,
the cycle of fourths
calls fingers to prayer.

It’s good for the lungs. Soul
stretching the limits
of upbeats down river.
Circling birds consider
the safety of rest.

A wail, slipping
by half steps
to the altar of logging
cranes, carries
an echo to sky high nests.

The caws, in counter
point, trill to the blues
and be-bop, await
the sudden funk
of sunset.

An hour, between trucks,
makes the day work.
Folding the instrument
back in the case restores
the calm.

The mask comes back.
Music shelters.
Every sound in the air
is feathered. Whistling
memory licks dry lips.

In the weeks a day
much likes another...
in the year, a moment
moves from chord
to chord.
Dreams of Light
Joe Shermis

Once I was so hunkered down
my blankets smothered me,
and as I tapped out life online
I decided I could see
all the things that were not here
but lived within all dreams
cuz as I reach out to the world
it becomes more than it seems...

Once I lit my soul on fire
with matches and a book,
and as I read the things I saw
within the place we look
I saw how things will show themselves
as dreams turn into light
as we wake up from the moment
and have gained a night of sight...

Once there was a given dream
that floated into days
and as we both remember
and forget the ancient ways
we give ourselves a reason
to look at what is true
and become the very moment
when then I turn to you...
See how it may already appear to be a losing battle and we choose to take up arms anyway? This is what we do. We shoulder the possibility of all endings and delve into the core of strength that is so, so old. We look beyond survival and explore the booming lineage of what it is to truly heal. We hold space for the great correction and develop connection bedside. In the moments before death, we pay tribute to that grand promise built into each body, the potential to mend and make new again. We apply ourselves to the path of aid even when we fail, for our efforts of attention, our presence and practice, can cause breath to return.
A Lot On Her Plate

Neil Tarpey

Our cell phone connection
is crystal clear,
my niece
a nurse who’s routinely so calm
holds back crying
she’s been the final face
a few patients have seen
before they died
in her Long Island hospital
whose 519 beds
are all COVID-19 cases.
I listen and worry about
dangerous twelve-hour shifts
heartbreaking compassionate care
her husband home sick with mono again
three college-age kids with cabin-fever
who must rebuild their backyard fence
blown down by a rainy windstorm
so their dog Buster won’t run loose.
Shit, she’s got a lot on her plate.
We discuss other family members
in the New York hot zone
I visited them all last fall
when none of us foresaw
a Grim Reaper virus
collecting the old and sickly
the young and bullet-proof
the cocky, the oh-so-holy,
the wrong-place-and-wrong-time victims.
After our conversation ends
I stare at the dying sunset
lilac orange amber crimson
a panoramic candlelight vigil
for those dead on the other coast
and a warning, quite clear,
that darkness is coming.
What Covid Took from Me
Dawn Tisdell

Covid took my last chance to see my mum again. The cancer gave her an expiration date, but at least cancer would wait just one-more-last week till spring break maybe cancer could wait a whole-lot-longer than just spring break, or the summer, or Thanksgiving maybe even Christmas

But Covid took her lungs capacity of a whole-lot-longer Covid couldn’t wait a whole-lot-longer Covid couldn’t even wait for our one-more-last… Covid took our one-more-last…

Covid took our one-more-last hug. Covid took our one-more-last eruption of laughter. Covid took our one-more-last motherly kiss, the kind you have to wipe off your cheek after. Covid took our one-more-last playful tease.

Covid took our one-more-last summer by the pool. Covid took our one-more-last volunteer day at the rose garden. Covid took our one-more-last cry over some dumb show, like American Idol. Covid took our one-more-last chance to see and hold each other’s faces.

And now, Covid makes me wait a whole-lot-longer see her ashes spread. Covid makes me wait a whole-lot-longer to cry to the tree that bears a plague with her name. Covid makes me wait a whole-lot-longer sleep in the bed she made me. Covid makes me wait a whole-lot-longer to see my Dad and my family.

But Covid didn’t take from us
Our one-more-last phone call
I could hear through her voice
That she knew—we didn’t have a whole-lot-longer

Covid drown her and Cancer choked her
But she fought to give us one-more-last words
she said, one-more-last time
“\textbf{I LOVE} you, sweetie”

And in those one-more-last words
She encased all the one-more-last times we would have had
She wrote all the one-more-last times into my soul
And through her one-more-last words she burned into my heart
I have a whole-lot-longer to see what Covid did NOT take from me.
Connection Failure

Izzy Un singer

Prom over Zoom is underwhelming,

Don’t let anyone tell you different.

Your dance partner is your pillow and he forgot to dress up.

He still has the drool stain from last week, but only you know that.

You look beautiful, all glitter and tulle.

And don’t forget your sweatpants. And shame.

Your friends look grand,

Luke is only in his pajamas.

Emma is wearing mini milk cartons as earrings, she made them herself.

Nate has dyed his hair for the third time this week.

Kate is reconnecting…

Sean is reconnecting…

Delilah isn’t here.

You miss the sweaty monkeys you call peers.

You miss the friends you call sweaty monkeys.

At least you have your family,

And they have their Netflix.
Everything you know is reconnecting…

Reconnecting…

Reconnecting…

Connection Failure.
Sometimes in the midst
of global pandemic crises
I sit on the river's bank
to watch gnats dance

then peel a grapefruit
just enough to see plump flesh
and pretend it's her

slowly sliding my finger
up
and
down
and in
and I bite my bottom lip

because I’m missing intimacy
and going nutty for lack of touch

I know, I know, such is too much

I've been told I overshare
that some things are just not
supposed to be mentioned

like how my heart sunk
and my knees buckled
to lover mud

screaming why why? why!? when I heard they told
the big companies
that pandemic means pollution
they could pour
into our water and our air

the water and air that’s yours
and yours and mine
and not only the American Petroleum Institute’s

or how how when I found out that the body of Homero Gómez González, Monarch Butterfly Defender, age 50, was found at the bottom of the well

I grieved for days and I’m not sure I will ever recover

or whether I should

when you can’t listen to mariposas and expect to survive

The war on truth and the war on imagination are the same war waged by the petty tyrant, Fear

and everybody knows ‘we're all in this together’ yet the well-offs will be weller off

while miles of lines flood the food banks finding the lives of lesser-offs

wondering what this together business is that we’ve been hearing so much about

and how I’m not supposed to admit that I let a Jacoby Creek’s worth of Jack
slowly wash me away

when I discovered
the decline in birdsong
and butterflies—
those other pandemics
we don’t mention
because it’s not polite

despite the work of Homero
and his friend Raúl Hernández Romero
whose skull someone found fit
to smash at the top
of a hill filled with sacred fir

because being human
requires a certain amount
of denial

but being human
also means telling the truth

and today the truth is
grapefruit turns me on
and I want clean air. I want
to drink wild, clean water. I want
every last king to fall

but every last monarch butterfly
to carry the souls of Homero and Raúl
into every person’s heart

and the truth is I want
to make love
to this ruby red
and forget about pandemics
The Ceiling Stares Back (but never answers)
Adrienne Veronese

& so the question
comes down to
whether to
stay or go
after all.
although not even
the most prescient
among us thought to
ask the ceiling this:

what cost does any kind
of future come to?
is this the day
i grow the tiniest death
within these walls
hoping for a dirge
to bring me out
of this fatal ounce of living?

how distanced must i become
a poet growing smaller
with each language forgotten
— including the language of touch?

(i regret that i have
but one death
to choose)

& even though there is little chance
of remembering much more
than i could write
in any single space
i still distract myself
by calling memories
on
the
phone  
in the middle of the night  

to remind me  
of when i was never young  
& so  
naturally  
less alone  
than i am  
now.  

(there is never any answer)
Lost in Calamity

Jake Williams

My Dad said when lost find your starting point by reversing course uphill or downhill until you see a distinctive familiar landmark. Being lost in the Covid-19 calamity is not like that. It is a vast baffling maze of data, disinformation and emotion. Dad’s advice falls flat in the face of this.

I go masked in public; avoid hugging kin and friends, observe social distancing. Over and over, I forget the time or day, or what activity was planned next. The TV runs unattended or I binge watch or blankly stare into the refrigerator.
Covideo

Amantha Wood

Dance-a-lone
Dance-a-long
Scroll-a-song.
Guitar in hand
Making bread, man.
Virtual tip jar
Quarantini from
My at home bar.
8 o’clock howl
Yoga online
Download divine.
Here's my cat
My belly fat
Homemade food
Homemade masks
Quarantine snacks
All gone.
Okay, I will play!
Lists:
Jobs I've held
(one is a lie)
Nouns in 4's
Popular likes I dislike.
~scroll some more.
Guitar in hand
Making bread, man.
Post-a-Pic
Of a landscape
I've been,
Not in.
4th pic on the camera roll
with blues, reds, yellows
and Teals (wtf?)
~scroll some more
10 Incredibly typical things
I love
for Realz!
Tag. I'm it.
10 album covers
10 mixtapes
10 8-tracks (not really)
Show us the 4th pic of your camera roll
that is white, brown or purple.
Guitar in hand...
Scroll-a-song
Ecstatic dancers in Zoom boxes.
Scroll-a-selfie
Shows to binge-watch. Go!
Kids cooking
Covid video chatting
Home schooling in the nook.
I'm not gonna read one dang book.
Breathe in Breath out
Memes. Loops of Giphy.
Lost Coast Outpost News.
Pretty day sunny walks
#staythefuckhome
~scroll some more.
#alonetogether
Okay, I'll play--
People:
connecting,
commenting,
(emojiing)
supporting,
participating,
sharing,
caring.
Social-in-place
Shelter-in-Face.
Book.
Contributors

Lasara Firefox Allen (she/they) is a writer, Witch, and gritty academic. From the wilds of Mendocino County, they currently reside in Arcata, in the ancestral and contemporary lands of the Wiyot people. Lasara is a Harm Reductionist, social justice activist, and co-conspirator for our collective liberation.

Robert Allen lives in Northern California where he loves and wanders, creating edges and intimacies in his head. Edges like a saw. Intimacies like a new lover. Robert lives for and in this, and also likes tea and cats and books and birds flying.

Greg Bee is a traveling poet based in Eureka, CA. His work deals with topics like mental health and addiction recovery, as well as social and political issues.

Michael Mallot Bickford is a partner, father, musician, scientist, democratic socialist, humanist, and for over forty years has been a teacher of adolescents, mostly in public middle schools. A life-long Californian, he graduated from San Francisco State University and writes fiction and poetry with the Lost Coast Writers Retreat Collective.

Since early childhood, Stephanie Bigham has held a fond appreciation for the nuance of the written word. She finds writing to be a means of discovering grounding significance in the mundane aspects of life.

Laurie Birdsong finds deep solace in the ever-changing wilds of the North Coast. She believes as we heal our relationship to the earth, we heal our lives and communities.
Susan Bloch-Welliver writes poetry to increase awareness and express layers of reality. She uses metaphor to express her impressions in both poetry and sculpture. This drove her interest in combining them. She received a 2019 Victor Thomas Jacoby Grant for poetic sculpture awarded by the Humboldt Area Foundation.

Sarah Brooks has lived in the Southern Humboldt community for thirty years and is thankful for the beauty of this place, which provides a daily source of inspiration. She recently completed a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies from California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco—find her @sarahneaththemoon

Wendy Butler is an associate faculty member at College of the Redwoods. She has been a print and radio journalist in Humboldt County for the past 25 years. She co-founded The Ink People Center For the Arts program Redwood Coast Writers’ Center, which held monthly writers’ groups and produced a bi-monthly Poetry Jam.

Daryl Ngee Chinn has lived in Arcata with his family since 1975 and has worked as a father, househusband, Chinese cooking teacher, admissions counselor, and poet. He encourages everyone to be patient, to get tested, and to stay curious and well.

Larry Crist lives in Trinidad and has one collection of poems: Undertow Overtures and a new story/poem collection Alibi for the Scapegoat due later this year.

Dylan Collins is a writer, spoken word artist and teacher dedicated to creating community. He is a nationally touring poet and author who has led writing workshops and coached youth slam poets coast to coast and created Word Humboldt, a spoken word community and open mic in Arcata.
Therese FitzMaurice writes on her back deck below a climbing white rose vine that someone planted years ago. Mother. Wife. Teacher. Poetry MC. Humboldt Immigrant, grateful for the Wiyot’s stewardship of this sacred land. She’s working to live sustainably and teach children how to honor the gift of being alive.

James Floss is the exclaimed author of several imaginary works including An Intricate History of Clock Mechanisms, the spy novel Bang! Bang! You’re Dead, and the fictitious children’s book, Hiffledy, Piffledy POP! a non-Newberry Award winner. Retired, he currently lives in Freshwater, California with his wife and various animals.

Mariana Franco lives in Los Angeles, California. Is part of a large group of poets in a published anthology of poetry titled, Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes & Shifts of Los Angeles.

Anne Fricke is an author, poet, podcaster, storyteller, mother, wife, and aspiring pandemic survivor. When she feels the fear of uncertainty, she goes to her garden to pull weeds.

Susanna Gallisdorf is a writer and painter whose practice is simply to listen and to see deeply into the nature of being. She resides and works in Arcata CA.


Susanna Gibson is registered nurse in a graduate program to be a nurse practitioner who loves her family and her job. Yes, you can ask her nurse questions, she won’t mind.
Karen Harris is the steward of Vanaprastha, a nature retreat and 50 acre permaculture farm on the Mad(alena) River. Karen is a grandmother, avid student of nature, life-long spiritual seeker and former minister of the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Bayside.

Kristy Hellum has been in and around Arcata since 1975, HSU Theater graduate, activist mischief maker, visual storyteller, Mother, Flow States Engineer, nonconforming MFT therapist who encourages outrageous acts of grief and then going outside to play more. Ever since she signed a healing contract with poetry, she’s been better.

David Holper has published two books of poetry, The Bridge (SequoiaSong Publications) and 64 Questions (March Street Press). He is the current Poet Laureate for the City of Eureka and teaches at College of the Redwoods.

Ian Jewett is a Humboldt transplant, poet, nature lover, and explorer working as a behavior consultant on the Northcoast. He carries his human experience through the coronavirus pandemic with all of the global community.

Deborah Kearns attended HSU in the 1980’s, later completing an MA at SFSU, but she never forgot the physical beauty of Humboldt. Finally returning in 2017, she discovered she didn’t have to give up the vibrant poetry community of the Bay Area; it was right here all the time.

Zev Levinson, author of Song of Six Rivers, brings poetry into classrooms and other sites through California Poets in the Schools. He has taught at Humboldt State University and College of the Redwoods, is a Redwood Writing Project teacher-consultant, and a founder of the Lost Coast Writers Retreat.
Jason M. Marak earned an MFA from Columbia University and returned to Humboldt after a decade in Tokyo teaching at Temple University's Japan campus. He's also worked as a hotel doorman in NYC, grill cook, house painter, garbage collector, and in 1990 he played semi-professional baseball for the Humboldt Crabs.

Jerry Martien lives in Elk River. He is the author of two collections of poetry: Pieces in Place, and Earth Tickets.

Pat McCutcheon retired from College of the Redwoods after 30 years of rewarding teaching. She writes more now and lives with her wife and two cats amid the redwoods of northern California, having published two chapbooks and many poems in journals and anthologies.

Katherine Nunes-Siciliani is a writer and photographer based in Arcata, CA. Her work explores the depth within each living moment.

Though he no longer wears latex gloves while shopping, Vincent Peloso does wash his hands often and well. And he hopes you do too.

Will Schmit is a Midwestern poet transplanted to Northern California. He has been reading, and writing poetry, in between bouts of learning to play the saxophone, for nearly fifty years.

Joe Shermis writes in the morning, works in the afternoon, and plays music at night. Sometimes he switches it up for fun...

Jacqueline Suskin has composed over forty thousand poems with her project, Poem Store. She is the author of six books, the latest Help in the Dark Season (Write Bloody, 2019). Her work has been featured in the New York Times, the Atlantic, and Yes! magazine. For more, see jacquelinesuskin.com.
Neil Tarpey’s poems and stories have appeared online and in print, including Flashes of Lightning, a Pushcart Prize nominee. In 1976 Neil left New York City and drove to Humboldt County, where he has worked primarily as a substance abuse counselor, a college instructor, and a sports writer.

Dawn Tisdell is an Environmental Resources Engineering student at Humboldt State University, enjoys biking around the Arcata Marsh with friends, and reading. She works at a small local company called Liberty CBD to create natural medicine alternatives.

Izzy Unsinger is one of two Youth Poet Laureates of Eureka. She lives at home with four cats and her family. In her free time, (which is a lot), she makes giant worms on strings and researches obscure stories for play material.

Ryan Van Lenning is an inner/outer wilderness guide, Founder of Wild Nature Heart, and the author of Re-Membering: Poems of Earth & Soul and High-Cooing Through the Seasons: Haiku From the Forest. He lives among the diverse forests and rivers of Humboldt County, ancestral Wiyot and Yurok territory.

Originally from the Pacific Northwest, Adrienne Veronese has been writing, publishing, and giving poetry readings since apprenticing at Boston's Stone Soup Poetry at seventeen, where her mentors included Corso, Ginsberg, Sexton and Snyder. Her undergraduate and graduate work were at the University of Oregon and Antioch University West in Seattle.

Jake Williams is a retired newspaper guy, who’s been trying for 19 years to court his elusive poetic muse. He writes, reads and studies poems in Eureka at the end of a lane rich with wild creatures.

Amantha Wood is a lover of dance, writing, river swims, and tree hugs. Her side professions are teaching Special Education, crafting dolls, and sewing homemade clothes.