

## FACTS VERSUS FEELINGS:

### Surviving 2020's Pandemic

In the current world of 2020, having to navigate life during the Covid-19 Pandemic we see the world evolve before our eyes. We wonder what we should have done, should be doing, and how to plan for our future. This collection captures new situations brought out by a pandemic in a world that has shrunk and been united globally since the last large pandemic. The ease of connecting in the modern world has not just joined us globally in comfort, communication, and material, and instead has made it easier for the virus to spread. What emotions can we feel from this alien threat arising from what used to be day-to-day life? We watch the wide spread of emotions and struggle to know what our response should be in uncertain times.

I first felt the pull to write these poems when completing interviews about locals' experiences during the pandemic. The pattern of repeating issues we all faced blended into emotions woven within those interviews. It has been the year of unanswered questions for me with new ones coming up regularly. Being a blind woman who is self-employed, I have had to deal with the stress of how Covid-19 had flipped my newer business along with the personal unrest and fears for me and my family's health. Like many during this year I have been left to juggle life when also needing to take on the extra freelance work completing the interviews for my local campus. I know I experience the world differently than most with my reliance on my other senses, revealing a different perspective or attentiveness to life around me. After realizing I wasn't alone and feeling the tug to capture these thoughts and feelings, this collection was produced.

This work is a collection of poems discussing Covid-19. These poems were developed using a form of writing called Ethnographic Poetry. This is the blending of Social Anthropology field work known as ethnography with the artistic writing style of poetry to express the observations made in research. The poems here use personal experience, general observations, and inspirations for interviews during Covid-19 in Summer and Fall 2020.

The first four poems were inspired by oral historical interviews conducted by myself for the University of Minnesota Duluth Archives. Each poem takes a different situation the individual interviewed has been experiencing and centers on that event or concern. The situations chosen to be written about are ones that me as the writer was not directly experiencing but still jumped out as an event that many in society are having to face on a regular basis due to the pandemic. It is important to cover this experience and what possible emotional turmoil's society has been involved in during this time.

The second part is three poems that have a broader and more generalize look at Covid-19. This avoids a singular topic instead covering large effects. The three key areas this section emphasizes

are Covid-19's initial entrance to the world, the physical effects that can happen to the body, and the social impact covid-19 has had on society.

The third and final section draws on my personal experiences being in a minority from being an individual that is blind during Covid-19. I wanted to represent the voice of my minority. This section is three poems all describing the world currently from my perspective and others like me. It draws on the senses I use day-to-day in substitute for sight, such as hearing or touch. The importance of how each sense is used and can be used in different situations has been influenced by Covid-19 in the blind world and has been a more extreme impact on how life and the adjustments we experience has have/have not worked. A good way to compare this replacement of the senses is even in the phrase to "visualize" doing something. When I do this, I do not see/picture something being done but instead I use my other senses. I feel the motion of my arm, the muscles strain, the displacement of the air, the warmth of the ceramics on my fingers, the sudden added weight as I lift the glass to my lips. That is how I "see" picking up a glass of coffee. It is all these sensations that the reliance and simplicity of vision pushes to the back or ignores in your mind. The ability to write and describe my world and how it is observed using these sensations well addressing the issues, emotions, and experiences brought on during Covid-19 is observed throughout these remaining poems.

I hope any future readers enjoy this collection and find it helps them unravel the mess of thoughts Covid-19 has left in their mind. I discovered these words helped straighten out if not answer the jumble of emotions I was feeling and understand the situation we are in differently. I wish it will help others realize that the experience now is not just them and that you are not alone. We are here together to take each other's hands and guide us through the unknown.

## OTHER TRUTHS

She stands and listens to their words.  
They all voice concerns but along other sides.  
Silent to her truths she stays.  
They tell her the whispers they have heard.  
She hears their complaints for directions she doesn't control.  
Some voice with fear others with anger,  
each tell her their story.  
When entered her door,  
sitting their words flow out steady when in her chair.  
Hearing two crashing sides joining at her store,  
so many voices to be heard.  
She knows only at home to tell her truth.

## OTHER TRUTHS

This is written with the influence of the Oral Historical Interview of Toni Rasmussen which I conducted. She is a hair Salon owner and her business as the location described. This poem circles around the fact of how often people open up discussions with her during their appointments. It has caused many people to speak about covid-19 and the choices being made by our leaders. The talking and relationship she has been able to build with her clients is more intimate than what would develop in larger towns/cities. This causes her clients to be more open in conversation. The influence of her experience is felt by many business owners currently with Covid-19 and the pending election causing many business owners to simulate her experience.

## CHILDREN

Turning off the news it's too much.  
Unable to live in the uncertainty.  
Infants not knowing their extended family,  
introducing yourself through a wall of glass.  
Stuck in their groups children call out for their friends.  
Can't go to the playground, parks, or be together.  
Most not having others to play.  
With the doors of childcare being thrust shut.  
Children unable to join with others.  
School forced into homes with no clear track.  
Young and old struggle trying to learn this situation.  
Watching, cleaning, and teaching kids.  
Fear of not knowing who carries, who carries through, and who it drags it with them.  
Running outside at the sign of summer dreading the arising winter.  
What will another school year bring for them?

## CHILDREN

This poem was influenced by the oral historical interview of Brenda Phab completed by me. Brenda is a childcare provider and grandmother so concern for children's safety and developmental growth was a large part of our discussion together. This poem really draws on people taking up new roles with schools being shut down and not having a clear direction on how to continue. Another good point was the lack of social interactions many children are experiencing because of the self-isolation of Covid-19. The concern for how they will be impacted is large, but unfortunately there is no strong way to know the influence it will have on these children.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Messages pass from family.  
Notified by phones all day and night,  
Much is told but what is true?

Homes shutting down, tracking ID's, knowing where they've been.  
Relieved their sons so far and safe.  
Rapidly reaching EU and US spikes.

Driven mad by what's unfamiliar.  
Along with it, News, supplies, and mask cross our world.  
Now separated by time, distance, and fear.

Worried to be separated by half the world and unable to act.  
Feeling the world wined to a halt.  
The world spins but we do nothing.

Unknowing when they can be seen again.  
Wishing safety to family so far.  
When will one be united again?

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

This poem was written with the influence of the oral historical interview of Jay Choi by me. Jay is a student from South Korea but has been living in Duluth Minnesota for the last several years. I found the difference in perspective being in the US but also having such a different response in the country he is from and his family is located in. distance was a big part of this poem because when covid-19 first left China South Korea was one of the early places to catch it. The communication of relief that he was so far from the risk early on and this bend as time passed due to the virus spread and how different countries reacted. The poem also talks about communication as a big part of how every thing was uncertain and evolving with us not understanding the virus.



## MASKING UNWELL

They say it changes every day,  
New rules each place to go.  
Covered by cloth they are kept safe?  
Wearing when their pulling, touching, and kept down.  
Entering in mask but safe in crowds to remove to eat.  
In restaurant and bar tables It can't find them.

Always have been walking with tight lungs,  
They don't believe their claims any more.  
To get food they suffer in pain and fall woozy with no air,  
Not allowed entrance believed to have lied.  
Unwell from before left gasping for breath,  
Turned from the doors and can't get food anymore.  
Those that unbelieved smothered by others.  
What of at risk but unbelieved when they can't wear a mask?

## MASKING UNWELL

This poem was written using the influence of the Oral Historical interview of Emily Walters by me. This poem is not intended to pick a political side for mask or not mask and the safety it provides but instead points out issue's society has been ignoring or creating with mask. The first part describes mask and really is an attempt to point out some of the regular hypocritical things people are doing involving wearing a mask. These are things like not wearing properly, taking on/off, or touching regularly. Another point I drew from the interview about mask was the fact that so many were going in and once they were sitting down to eat or drink at a location it was like they found themselves in a bubble from covid-19. I wanted to include this because many of the people going out are going out to drink and it has been an area people are being regularly exposed. The second part of the poem is pointing out how people who had pre-existing conditions have been treated with covid-19. People who could not wear mask because of lung conditions or other medical issues are being denied store entrance. I discuss some of the personal symptoms Emily's relative had because they had to wear a mask to get basic supplies. The conditions are not something you could see on some one but society has chosen to decide many are lying.

## ISOLATION

the winter covered in darkness by it's passage through our world.

Like the snow falling it is not us that controls it.

The unseen that comes in a chilling night.

Whispers of it coming blowout despite its hushed howls.

Masked we cover what we don't want out.

Washing the hands of the filth of this world.

Choosing 6 feet apart or 6 feet under.

Self-isolation that's what's best?

We fear the children go to school.

Adults not working to stay well.

For the sick and old no one comes.

Unaccompanied all stay some no friends or family near.

Amass supplies we gather.

Catching what came new with a whirl.

They cover its news but still it spreads.

The isolation and panic arising from the fear of some thing we know is here.

Forced alone we lysin for news.

One removes from a peril so near.

We all alone hide out in horror.

Living death that's what I fear.

Isolation can it truly be best?

Only tomorrow knows what was true.

## ISOLATION

This poem was written to explain the world's response to Covid-19. It discusses covid-19 in a large scale and us not knowing how to respond to this new unknown thing in the world. Since the virus showed up in winter it first describes the virus and its entrance making many similarities between the virus and a blizzard. The words chosen emphasize our attempts in the beginning to bottle up the virus. It makes similarities to the harshness of winter and like a blizzard we could not initially control the virus. The next section uses safety practices and bends the wording to explain the fear and emotion response people are going through. It goes into the reverse society does where every thing we have been told/doing is not what to do like sending children to school. the poem describes its spread as in news and its physical spread in the world. The emphasis on the self-isolation we face now and the fact that only the future will be able to look back and possibly know what actions should have been taken.

SECRETS THAT IT RISES

The secrets that it rises out,  
What issues kept covered up?  
Some truths found false and wrongs found true.  
A veracity striking the deprived.  
Those left cramped and in need forced to labor.  
Unable to seek care when ill.  
No gods aloud out in this time,  
Practiced only alone and in fear.  
Reaching for invisible hands to help those in need.  
Isolation and distance is felt in mass.  
Unhinged many get pushed to their points of breaking.  
Un-able to see a future and trapped in this time.  
Marching down the street instead of celebrating.  
Slurred to many the days blur through the glass.  
Victims in a loop with their abuser.  
the old alone and unsupplied or gathered in danger.  
Bringing the beasts of the world out to the surface.  
what other fear do we adherer?

## SECRETS THAT IT RISES

The poem changes to focus on the social impacts of covid-19 on society as a whole. It is written to make more broad statements about areas society has been influenced. It is to emphasize that covid-19 did not just have a medical impact on the world during this time period. Lines are often covering societal issues that have arisen or worsen like suicide/depression, alcoholism, domestic abuse, and other such issues. This was gathered by reading a series of articles online and taking notes of larger areas being affected in society.

## THE BODY

We fight against the unfamiliar,  
It grasp the old and weak.  
Inside it leaves its mark on our lungs, brain, and hearts.  
On machines some wake but still repeat the unnerving visions.  
Survived but trapped in fear and worry.  
It takes and slashes the back of those defending from another.  
Leaving pressure it pushes and smothers.  
Decorating some in hues of blues,  
Heavy eyes left confused.  
It visits by person and makes new agents.  
Leaving no smell or taste.  
Carrying unobserved upon so many.  
These are its marks so far found true.  
Watch in yourself for its cyphers.

## THE BODY

This uses research gathered through the Mayo Clinic and CDC. This poem is intended to cover what Covid-19 could do to a singular human body. The lines show the wide array of symptoms or lack thereof an individual could experience. The point of this poem is to help better understand what the human body is/could be physically experiencing with covid-19. Unlike medical journals the poem structure is hoped to draw more attention and help catch a greater focus to the symptoms by future readers instead of being glanced over.



## HANDS TO SEE

Unable to feel the world surrounding me,  
It's my hands and fingers that see for me.  
Wanting to experience my world,  
Being restricted by unfamiliar dangers.  
Unsafe to feel and see feeling alone it leaves me.  
Hands to see the sizes, shapes, and inform me.  
How I miss the world around me,  
Feeling like a lost memory.  
In a world unsafe to feel to see,  
Is what surrounds me truly there?  
Existing it claims to be,  
desires to experience grow to wishes.  
Without touch how do I see that I'm there?  
Restricted from the world around me,  
How long well I be left unable to use my hands to see for me?

## HANDS TO SEE

This poem was written to point out how me as a blind individual has had other impacts with covid-19 to my life. I wanted to express to society how touch is often used for the blind in replacement to sight. The words touch and see are often switched back and forth between the poem to emphasize how strongly the blind rely on touch in replacement of vision. Even when going out it can often feel like another sense of the body has been removed because covid-19 especially early on had restricted physical contact. It draws this lack of connection from the world.

NO LINE FOR FORGOTTEN

Blind we are left alone.  
Disconnected from society,  
no one to help and unable to communicate.  
The new world of solitude we're found trapped within.  
Others have gone to the web joining them to the world,  
we find it blocks us from our presence.  
Openness to the web of stores cuts its lines at our doors.  
Food not able to carry home or use an order.  
Work finding walls unlike others open doors.  
Its claim to function never was tested,  
we are told to be lab rats or that it must be us in error.  
No lines have been strung out to reach our seclusion.  
Trying to be heard but no way to cast our polls.  
How long will we stay forgotten?

## NO LINE FOR FORGOTTEN

This poem is inspired by my personal experience and a study completed by American Foundation for the Blind called “Flatten inaccessibility: Impact of Covid-19 on Blind and Visually Impaired Adults In the United States” (<https://www.afb.org/research-and-initiatives/flatten-inaccessibility-survey>). The focus is the lack of access I and other members of the blind community have had to major resources the rest of the world has relied on during covid-19. We have been experiencing a key lack in resources including issues or inaccessible online shopping formats, decrease or lack of travel options to get food/supplies. Work and schools switching to unplanned online programs has many issues with many options being found un-usable with accessibility software/programs. For some this has had problems with judgements being made that it is the blind individual at fault and not that a program might not be completely useable if able to interact with at all. I used the description of a web because it has been the major resource people have turned to for all connections to the world around them, and for me and other blind individuals it often feels like our line to the spider web connecting everyone has been cut off.

## GROWING SILENCE

I hear the world gasp around me.  
Whispers and screams drawn out by concerned.  
Standing with no recognition for the silence surrounding me.  
Muffled I listen to those speaking through covered lips.  
I walk the streets and I'm met with silence.  
Wondering where mankind has hidden.  
Unknown scuttles from animals exploring what we left empty.  
Unable to recognize what's surrounding me without its familiar cues.  
Walking I find only locked doors.  
I hear no calls or laughter any more.  
Do others see what I hear we have lost?  
I hope I'll hear the world once more.

## GROWING SILENCE

This poem is directed to the sense of hearing. The sense is relied on heavily to recognize the world and what is happening around a blind individual. I wanted to explain my experience with how the world has changed audibly since Covid-19 came into the world. I feel that many people don't or haven't noticed how the sound of the world around them has changed since the pandemic began, and being blind and relying on this sense so fully has made this change so much more apparent to me. I often use sounds to recognize directions or the different objects. Even the noise other people make when walking can be helpful to get a better idea of directions or turns that open up ahead. I often would use the changes in in my peers' conversations' echoes to recognize that the hallway had changed or the change in foot step patterns to find stairs when I was a student. This is still something I use when traveling alone in public areas, and the sudden silence can make areas I had previously been familiar with unrecognizable. The silence also leaves me with this emotional vacancy as often said in the Steven King book series *The Dark Tower*, "The world has moved on." We will be stuck to wait and watch how our world has evolved.