Expectations

Expecting the unachievable
In light of the unbelievable
We alter our days
In previously inconceivable ways
We hold out hope for a return
Of the ways we used to learn
Of the ways we used to operate
Without stopping to appreciate
That it may take a gradual shift
To even mend the rift
Caused by a pandemic
Many aspects of which are systemic
That haven’t been addressed
Much less even confessed
But I digress
And return to clean up the mess
Made by my quarantined offspring

—Sarah Rejoice Brown, Essex Junction
Fire

I’ve asked to have a fire built in the fireplace.
The sun is retreating and the pale blue spring sky fades
Outside robins hop round on stiff legs
enjoying final evening conversations

Quizzical looks
as an armful of wood comes in from the box—a trail of bits
smells like pines
across the floor
the warm, early spring air smells soft
as the door closes and pushes it in

I stand and watch
sticks crossed and crossed again
paper crumpled with deliberation
then tucked
into corners
pine cone crown

A moment to pridefully observe from bended knee
strike

I walk to the couch and sit
tuck myself into sheepskin
watch the flames
take over

As the fire grows the wood shifts
pine cones snap
I feel my fear
retreat in the presence of the elemental

The same sky under which others have lingered
next to fires
hoping for warmth
for safety
for comfort
in the face of something bigger

—Melissa Perley, Berlin
A boat out in the distance—
Calming to hear the rush of the waves
Nothing like the rushing rivers not too long ago.
You can see Chicago across the lake
It’s turbulent—
One that takes lives.
There’s thousands dying now.
Nothing seems to stop it
Not masks
Not gloves
Never enough.
There are those deemed essential—
What does that make the rest of us?
Driftwood buried in the sand
Rubbed Smooth from the constant water…
Churches fill with dead bodies
Rows and rows of Caskets lined up in symmetry
Despite all of this, the birds keep singing
In the morning and the
Frogs at night

—Kris Underwood, Montpelier (Honorary)
Modern Apocalypse

Anger rises and burns fiercely, raging against
How you and I just couldn't make it work.
I hate this feeling
I hate all this “it could have been different if only....
if … if … if ONLY...”
STOP.
There was nothing I could do to help you
I already knew it
I didn't have the energy to try anymore.

The crazy, funneling thoughts—
You hear about swarms of locusts
Descending somewhere in Africa, earthquakes and abnormal flooding
Wondering if this really is
The end of the world—
That the next plague is here
And the boats are waiting to take us down the river for burning.

—Kris Underwood, Montpelier (Honorary)
Gratitude

I came outside to write about gratitude for bigger things, like loved ones and relatives’ good health. Instead I am thinking about this wide and quiet porch where I sit, this chair holding up my feet, the tree in my yard, the snow, all melted, the neighbors who wave from bicycles, the stretch of mountain through the trees, this pen, this paper, this hand to write about it.

—Rachel Funk, Morrisville
Your warmth rises to my surface
That’s how this distance between us works
because time is not linear and space our dance.

—Eva Zimet, Montpelier
Horizontal Hold

There is no joy but calm
—Tennyson

My couch and I a matching set
I’m master of the thermostat
my heart jumps up in my throat
with the thought of a lost remote

I’m really acting on a hunch
for at breakfast time I eat lunch
and like the past that I employ
it’s laziness that I enjoy

Never tire of the same view
lots to keep my interest too
movies with cliffhanger hooks
from heroes found in comic books

Society itself is never sated
can this desire be over rated
if all it takes is a disaster
to come together better faster

I’ll see you soon just the same
let’s stay ahead in this here game
when the waters part I’ll return
until then live, love and learn

—Jimmy Tee, Milton
to the living world

it’s not so hard, really—

first you lose the watch
and take the clocks from the house.
then you ditch the television set
it marks time in the strangest of all ways,
a synchronized fiction even the six o’clock news
can’t intercept—it being fiction too.
then you stop eating scheduled meals
and graze when your belly says it’s hungry
feel the growl down there, something primitive,
remembered, base of the brain stuff
that rekindles your commonality with the world.
then you spend more time out in the back woods,
feel the moss, soft and cool under your feet,
then you lay down on it,
let it cradle your cheek, find the contours
of your body, fit you like a hug,
and then you breath in the scent of the earth,
and notice the way rocks smell
when the sun has baked them,
how the wind carries the light,
the scent of grass and flowers
feathering your nose with their flirtation.
then you listen to the buzz of bees
and the hum of hummingbird wings as they search for nectar,
and slowly, slowly your ears and eyes become more keen,
more discerning as you watch the bird’s
wings beating, and see that you can count them,
each beat, and when you have let go enough
when you have stopped measuring altogether,
when you have let the rhythms
of the world greet you like a heartbeat,
time reaches out and takes a breath,
letting out a deep satisfied sigh
and invites you back to the table,
to the banquet,
to the living world.

—mary l. collins, Lake Elmore
And the Robins said:
It’s alright that you can’t remember a time before you fashioned a halter for
time. We are your brothers and once danced with you in winter barley. We
watched you leave your scythes unoiled, rusting in the barn. We watched
you lose your horses to machines who howled in pain but without words.
We tried to learn the new words you were speaking but our breath could
never catch them. So we have returned to you at the turning of the year.
We followed the thawsong North and found you counting your days with
fumbling hands. You can relax now, humankin. We will draw the sun from
its sleeping, from the deep earth springs. We will name each wanderer who
enters the Woods. We will build nests from windblown twigs and bits of
your hair left for us at the edges. We will see this through together—this
Great Remembering, this Great Renewal.

—A. Williams, Montpelier
Clouds

Clouds move across the sky
like nothing else...
Except maybe DNA.
DNA … a double helix
moving in excited waves.
Clouds seem to move slowly
and rhythmically.
But they are far away,
perhaps they are excited!
Clouds do seem
To move
Like twisting helixes,
Undulating across
The sky.

—dianne richardson
Last Goodbye in the Time of Corona

He died alone, and he will be buried alone.
—Der Spiegel

For those who have lost loved ones to Covid19

The darkness arrived without your voice
or touch, my love, and yet I heard
your voice and felt your hand in mine.
Nothing in the end, not even death,
can lose my grip from yours.
What can I say that echoes here
and beyond? Just this:
you were always so contagious, dear,
my hazelnut, my vast,
but unlike this germ, you infected me
with a love that made me better
than well, that was a gift of bliss
I didn’t deserve.
So take these words that are not mine
but the ones you gave me
in the silence of this room
and I return.
You were there, I tell you.
You were there when I was crossing
from there to here,
and you are here as well, right now.
No absence—yours or mine—
can fill itself with itself anywhere
when two have loved
as we did love, if only for a time.

—Chard deNiord, Westminster West
I Tell You What

I tell ya.
Nothing like a gloomy drizzly afternoon
on a day awash in Covid 19.
Takes the cards
right off the horizon.
I tell ya.
Time for some cards
better than these.
I tell you what.

—Toussaint St. Negritude, Plainfield
They Told Us

not to wear masks
not to panic
it’s a hoax
everything’s beautiful.
The numbers, they’re
beautiful.
And we became again
mere numbers
as we do in the collective
justice system, as we do
in any school, as we did when
we entered camps & gas chambers,
as we are now when we enter
PINs or SSNs or credit card numbers
to buy buy buy but
not the masks, no
don’t buy those,
who needs those? Only
the sick need those.
You don’t need them
to breathe the air—the fresh
and beautiful air, see? There’s
nothing wrong with the air—
born of nature, no, there’s no way
this virus
lives in the air (it’s too small,
just like our numbers), only
surfaces, just wash your hands,
when you touch them, or
just do nothing, just
go out to eat and tip your servers,
just wash your hands, but you,
you’re beautiful, a real
number, why would you
want to hide your face
behind a mask?

—Samantha Kolber, Montpelier
Tears of a doctor fighting the virus

In an otherworldly stupor
I survey the ICU ward—
as the epidemic explodes,
COVID-19 exacts its toll:
the unwell entombed in their beds,
sucking life-sustaining oxygen
out of those scarce ventilators,
monitors flashing and ringing,
each grim breath a fight to survive
until the next, or the very last.
I dread the coming invasion,
when I will be forced to play god,
and decide who gets the machine
just freed up as another corpse
is wheeled away to the morgue:
the diabetic and deaf child,
the uncompromised grandfather
or the mother with breast cancer,
while I send the rest to the grave.

This is not what a doctor does:
I am an executioner.

—Geza Tatrallyay, Barnard
We heard

We heard it was in China
China is six thousand miles away, almost seven
so we went to our service jobs, clerk jobs, government jobs
our gyms, our spring break parties, our favorite Friday night restaurants
We heard it was in Italy
Italy is four thousand miles away
so we went to our Costcos, our concerts, our favorite dive bars
We heard it was in the United States
but not in our state, so we went
to our required work conferences, our pharmacies, our casual paper bag shopping trips
We heard it’s in our state
but it’s just two cases at the local hospital
so we went to our bookstores, our courts, our swimming pools
We heard there are only two deaths in our state
offices are closed, there is nothing to do but watch Netflix
the systems are getting overloaded
can’t buy Lysol wipes or toilet paper
it’s hard to find meat, fish, and produce
We heard the government is going to help
checks for everyone, mortgages suspended!
We heard the hospitals don’t have enough masks, ventilators
that system overload is killing over 700 people a day in Italy
We heard in middle school about the Spanish flu of 1918
the Cold War
our parents hiding under desks as though somehow that could
protect them from Nuclear Fall out
we laugh at how unprepared they were
how silly their behavior
We heard that people aren’t allowed to leave their homes
that the stock market has crashed
that everyone is laid off
We heard that
over a million people died
our brilliant children, hard working wives, creative husbands, strong nurses, determined doctors, loyal postmen,
we weep into chapped hands and say,
“If only We had heard sooner…”

—Chloe Viner, Swanton
Virus Verse

stay well, everyone

Moment to moment
Everything changing
Facts or fiction?
Filled with fear

Do I stay
Or do I go?
There is much
that I don’t know

Breathe, stay calm
Let common sense prevail.
Best judgment
or best guess?

Day by day
Moment by moment
Step by step
That’s all we have

I put one foot in front
of the other
en route to my recliner
in front of the TV.

Water bottle at my side
phone and book,
pen and pad.

—Susan Bauchner, Warren