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Academic Motherhood and COVID-19

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The Poetry of the Pandemic

This autoethnographic essay is a co-constructed endeavour that documents how we—a MotherScholar and a Black Woman scholar—both used poetic inquiry as feminist methodology (Faulkner) in order to respond to and find reprieve from the emotional gamut we each experienced during COVID-19. Though not professional poets, we value the craft of poetry and found it most suitable to capture the emotional labour of performing our caregiving responsibilities as mother and grandmother in our respective home spaces while trying to maintain our (virtual) workloads in institutes of higher education. Poetry was an opportunity for us to make sense of our changing identities and unpredictable emotions while being constantly bombarded with experiences and roles we never asked for or ever anticipated confronting—at home or work.

The poems vary in content and form in an attempt to capture the diversity of experiences we each encountered while attempting to weather the same storm but in different boats. Collectively, the poems speak to the competing messages of comfort and confusion we each received during this volatile and traumatic time. By sharing our lived experiences, we invite others to bear witness to our COVID-19 realities of being forced to care for everyone and everything while still trying to care for ourselves, and we hope that readers find solace in a shared story, adopt this self-inquiry method as a form of self-care, and/or are prompted to check on any and all of the mothers that are just trying to survive COVID-19.

When home becomes your office

When work invades your kitchen

When you teach other people's children while your own children sleep twenty feet away

When online #crisisschooling is forcing you to choose between teaching your daughter math or being a good mom

When the incessant, unmistakable ding of emails demanding accountability for your time, your whereabouts, your productivity bombards your screen—

What are you doing?! Show me! Count it up.

Tally it.

Tally it again in a different format.

Tally due today!

New tally in a different format for a different reason due tomorrow!!

Convince me you are doing your job!!!

Your care for your children better not be getting in your way!

—while you try to focus on the comforting hum of students learning from you online in another open tab

When COVID-19 forces a nation to observe a stay-at-home order, when can a MotherScholar find her own space among the unsolicited, unreasonable, and unimaginable expectation to become all things, to all people, at all times

*When the pandemic tries to tell you that you CAN'T be a mother **and** a scholar in the same space, at the same time*

When?!

Perhaps...

...in the stolen moments between feeding children and contributing in Zoom meetings,

...in the margins of a work journal borrowed from her children's bag of returned school supplies,

Perhaps ...

...in the form of a poem. (Burrow)

Introduction

This autoethnographic, arts-based article of original poems and photographs shares how we—Lauren, a MotherScholar and Tonya, a Black Woman scholar—used poetic inquiry as feminist methodology (Faulkner) to make parallel spaces to both respond to and find reprieve from the emotional gamut we each experienced as a result of COVID-19 (and 2020 in general). Although we are not professional poets, we value the craft of poetry and find it most suitable to “provide insight and critical perspective” (McCulliss 83) to capture the emotional labour of performing both professional and caregiving responsibilities during a global pandemic. For Lauren, that labour included being a mother of three elementary school-aged children in the same space and at the same time, as she was expected to maintain her faculty workload of teaching, service, and scholarship in a college of education. For Tonya, that labour turned into tackling her responsibilities as a university administrator from home, caring for and assisting in the homeschooling of her granddaughter, and creating an in-garage quarantine space for her husband—an essential

worker. We turned to poetry to help us work through and attempt to make sense of these new and redefined identities that resulted from and were in response to huge, unexpected shifts in our professional and personal lives during the global pandemic, a heightened national awareness of civil rights inequities, as well as other 2020 events demanding we fill roles no mother ever expected to fill.

The poetic inquiry presented in this article facilitated our exploratory reflection on our emotions resulting from the experiences brought about by COVID-19. Our poems address our perception of who and what harmed or helped our occasional attempts to thrive rather than just merely survive during COVID-19 and the rest of 2020. The poems are inspired by and seek to acknowledge the voices of the many people and events that found or forced their way into our “home-work” spaces—including employers, female social groups, students, social media, civil unrest, and family members. Collectively, the poems speak to the competing messages of comfort and confusion received during these ongoing volatile and traumatic times. By sharing our lived experiences in poetic form, we hope others will be able to connect with and learn from our COVID-19 reality; simultaneously, we hope that positioning our methodology as a potential self-care practice will help other mothers who are being forced to care for many others while still trying to care for themselves.

“I’m an artist who makes constant mistakes” (Outspoken Bean).

2. The Poets

Identity work is the dynamic, ongoing construction, and reconstruction of one’s identity. For this research essay, we acknowledge intersections of a variety of salient identities that informed, guided, and embodied our poetry. Essential to the understanding of our poetic process and meaningful interaction with our poems is awareness about the poets and our positionality during COVID-19.

Dr. Lauren E. Burrow

I am a tenured associate professor of elementary education in my sixth year at my current institute of higher education. I am a white, cisgender female, married with three children. I claim an identity of MotherScholar—an identity presented with the intentional formatting of a single word featuring the capitalization of both “mother” and “scholar.” Throughout this essay, I will revert to the formatting choices of others (e.g., Matias; Lapayese) when referencing their scholarship on mother-scholarhood, but when speaking about my experiences, I will use “MotherScholar” to remind myself and others that I am both forced to and willingly embrace a reality in which my two deeply important identities manifest as a blended coexistence that is always

flowing throughout both my personal and professional times and spaces (Burrow et al.). Prior to COVID-19, I had explored with other coauthors how claiming a MotherScholar identity meant that I had accepted that I am always “mom” and always “scholar” and had erased the guilt associated with trying to balance these two identities; instead, I chose to acknowledge and celebrate how each mentored, inspired, and improved the other (Burrow et al.). But during these pandemic times, I felt my “mother” and “scholar” side fighting each other, vying and pushing me to accept “mother-scholar”—a hyphen I had tried to reject. But ironically—in my own home—my mother-self constantly felt it was being told to “find another space,” “carve out time later,” and “seek out moments somewhere else.”

As national awareness about COVID-19 grew, my family and I were completing spring break. Although the Texas governor did not issue a shelter-in-place/stay-at-home order, my children’s schools and my university did not resume in-person classes after spring break. (The governor eventually declared all Texas schools closed for the remainder of the school year.) So, school resumed for my eleven-year-old daughter and ten- and eight-year-old sons through an online platform facilitated by their teachers. Before spring break was over, my face-to-face courses in a cotaught, community-based teacher education program had to be rapidly transformed into online offerings for two weeks, which eventually became reality through the end of the semester. My husband was able to pause his contract home-repair work and did not return to work outside the home until summer. I continued online teaching throughout the summer and took courses in a master’s program I had elected to enter into through a benefits program started by my university in early spring. In August, my department chair made the decision that all fall courses would be offered online. I currently teach three courses online; all three of my children attend two different schools online, and my husband has resumed work outside of the home.

Dr. Tonya D. Jeffery

I am a new, tenure-track assistant professor of science education. I am starting my fourteenth year in the field of education. I began my teaching career in K-12 as a middle-school science teacher, then as a university professor, and, most recently as a university administrator. I am a Black, cisgender female, married with one son, and we have one adorable granddaughter. My husband and I are empty nesters; however, our friends tend to counter this claim as our granddaughter spends most weekends at our home—and we love it! When COVID-19 became a global pandemic, my husband and I had recently taken a cruise to celebrate my birthday, and my university was currently on spring break. As Lauren shared, the Texas governor did not immediately issue a stay-at-home order. However, out of an abundance of caution, Houston’s mayor did

issue such an order. Therefore, all schools and my university did not resume in-person classes after spring break; the governor did eventually declare all of the state's schools to remain closed for the remainder of the academic school year. In addition, most daycare facilities, YMCAs, and other childcare organizations also closed. Fortunately, because I was now working from home, and for the safety of our granddaughter, she stayed with me during the day while her parents worked.



My granddaughter working at her desk while I worked at our kitchen table.

So, learning for my granddaughter resumed through the homeschooling facilitated by her parents and me. My husband was considered an essential employee, so he continued to work daily in the field. He and I created a quarantine space in our garage to mitigate and prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 and prayed his daily work in the field would not jeopardize our health and livelihood. As a university administrator of a revenue-generating centre, my challenge was to transfer all of our current programming from a face-to-face format to online platforms and to transfer upcoming professional development and certification prep workshops for both in-service and pre-service teachers to an online platform for the remainder of the spring semester and throughout the summer. Meetings continued via Zoom. Lots of meetings occurred each week. My granddaughter was a regular attendee at most meetings, unless she was napping. This became our new normal—my new normal workday and her new normal pre-K school day. She worked at her desk while I worked at my desk, kitchen table, or dining room table. I would take

breaks often to play with my granddaughter, assist her with a puzzle, read a book to her, or cook her breakfast or lunch.



My granddaughter completing a puzzle and keeping me company while I worked at our dining table. Every fifteen minutes or so she would ask, “Nana, are you done?”

The pandemic created a pause in my life, which allowed me to reflect on and thoughtfully determine what matters most in life. So, I began prioritizing my purpose, reexamining my values, and assessing how my current role aligned with these values. It was during this time that I decided to take the opportunity to pivot and pursue my passion of teaching once again. I submitted numerous applications and am so grateful I was able to secure my dream role here at my current university. I am currently teaching three courses online; my husband is still working in the field, and our granddaughter is being fully homeschooled by her parents. During this time, my identity as a Black Woman and as a scholar became explicitly intersected with my roles and identities of being both a mother and grandmother or a Black MotherScholar and a Black GrandmotherScholar.

Poetry is the “heart thing I do for myself” (Brown and Jacobs).

3. Why Poetry?

Debbie McCullis claims that we are all surrounded by poetry—every day, everywhere—and that we are drawn to poems for the joy, meanings, and memories they bring to our lives because “they have the ability to reveal the truth of our lives more passionately than the overlying narrative” (109). As mothers, we recognize our natural embrace of poetry has been found throughout our personal lives—recited as soothing bedtime nursery rhymes to our children when they were young, chanted in the streets as powerful anthems at Black Lives Matter protests, or sung aloud with our adolescents as we drive to anywhere. As scholars, we followed Liza Hayes Percer’s encouragement to lean into our natural tendency towards poetic verse to help us make sense of these senseless time, to present our nontraditional narratives through nontraditional research practice, and to better document, for others, the beautiful complexity of our lives in a way that only poetry can capture.

“I love the deep attribute of poetry to pause, to look, to listen, to respect, to pay attention to variety and learn something new.” (Nye)

4. Poetry as Methodology and Project

Our choice of poetic inquiry within our autoethnographic article served as both research method and research project (Faulkner, “Poetic Inquiry” 210). We engaged in our poetic journeys along common yet distinct lived experiences occurring in parallel spaces during COVID-19 times. The arts, in essence, helped each of us to prioritize the valuing of our personal experiences (Adams and Hermann 2) during a complex, confusing time. Like Brearley, we recognize the use of poetry, a creative-arts technique, as a research practice that allowed us to explore, represent, and reflect “richness and complexity of data and invite new and multiple levels of engagement that are both cognitive and emotional.” McCullis elaborates the following: “Poems can be gathered from specific groups to describe ethnographic data. They can be used as an interview tool, written by participants as answers to questions or they can be the subject of study” (88). For us, we were able to use the poetic process as a self-interrogation tool and the resulting poetry became our answers to all the questions being asked of us—by ourselves, our workplaces, our children, and society.

Thinking poetically about the research inquiry process helped us to collect the most relevant themes and phrases out of the storm of emotions swirling within and around us (Prendergast) during COVID-19. As an “experimental text form,” poetry granted us the cathartic opportunity to analyze, reconstruct, and confirm our lived experiences while empowering us to report our qualitative essay in a nontraditional format (Carr 1330). We recognize and

accept that “poetry is not generalizable in the statistical sense of the world, but generalizable in that it helps stimulate an empathetic understanding in the reader” (Gallardo et al. 291). During a global pandemic, during tragically harmful civil unrest throughout our nation, and during nontraditional work-life times, a nontraditional methodology and reporting style was essential to ensuring that we—as Mother/GrandmotherScholars already overburdened by traditional scholarly demands and daunted by traditional scholarship expectations—could publish our study on our own terms and in a format well-suited to present our multifaceted stories.

Poetry as Feminist Methodology

As self-identified Women in academia, we actively and intentionally choose to overlay a feminist lens through which we inherently and intentionally approach our professional-personal lives and labour. Sandra Harding identifies three characteristics of feminist research: (1) generating problems “from the perspectives of women’s experiences”; (2) motivating scholarship for females so as to provide them with explanations they actually “want and need”; and (3) locating “the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter” (7-8). Firmly rooted in feminism, our scholarship was “conducted at the margins of traditional disciplines” (Hesse-Biber, Nagy, and Leavy 5) and in celebration of the power and potential of poetry. We join Sandra Faulkner in seeing “poetic inquiry and feminist poetry [as] examples of how we can engage in embodied inquiry to emphasize the importance of storytelling and narrative in the representation of knowledge and everyday experience” (“Crank Up the Feminism” 5). Our continued commitment to storytelling takes on a higher purpose when chosen as the vehicle by which to disseminate our research in that it honors our deeply personal Mother/GrandmotherScholar voices in what is typically patriarchal spaces (i.e., preferred and valued research methodology and dissemination in traditional formats).

Poetry as MotherScholar Methodology

Among other identities, we identify as Grandmother/MotherScholars. First coined by Matias and further explored by Lapayese, “mother-scholars drive the feminist impulse to dismantle patriarchal binaries—namely, the sharp divide between the intellect and the maternal, the public and the private” (17); they also find “creative ways to insert [the] maternal identity, specifically in academic spaces and [into] scholarship” (23). For us, incorporating the arts afforded us that creative opportunity to effectively insert our maternal selves throughout the collection and presentation of our personal thoughts in our professional work. Specifically, poetic inquiry facilitated research that “lay[s] naked the taken-for-granted assumptions and social structures and stretch[es]

the binaries with a focus on personal family intimacies ... [collapsing] the false divide between ... public and private” (Faulkner, “Crank up the Feminism” 16). The final proclamation of our Mother/GrandmotherScholar identity is pictured throughout this article in the home-life photography—candid and staged for artistic purposes—which we included alongside our poetry as an arts-based research tool to “capture the wholeness and complexity of the human experience and create empathetic reactions in others” (McCullis 95).

“I think of myself as a living poem” (Outspoken Bean).

The Poems

In the next sections, we present our poetry. Our poems are, by no means, able to capture the totality of our pandemic time; instead, they act as snapshots, time capsules crafted to hint at the sweeping panorama of emotions we experienced as our relationships with colleagues, family, our own scholarship, and even society changed during COVID-19. Our poems hope to effectively evoke the extremely taxing emotional and mental labour of performing caregiving responsibilities (including the unexpected role of facilitating emergency remote learning for our children or grandchild) while managing the constantly changing professional requirements demanded of us by our open-for-business-but-physically-closed campus workplaces—all during the unnerving uncertainty of a global pandemic and other 2020 events. The writing of our poetry was a cathartic gift to ourselves, and the presented poems are our gift to readers with the two-prong goal of both inviting readers to connect with our lived experiences and acting as a model of potential self-care practice for other mothers in academia.

Surge Capacity, Part I (Burrow)

Inspired by a poetic prompt from Naomi Shihab Nye and informed by an article by Tara Haelle.



My youngest son and I baking sugar cookies together.

When COVID-19 first hit, it felt like summer camp. We reconnected with family we barely knew. We traded our work clothes for jeans, stretchy pants, fuzzy socks, comfy tees, and sometimes it was event pants optional. We laughed. We stayed up late and turned off all the alarm clocks. We had an abundance of “let’s...”

Let’s bake a cake

Let’s stay up late and sleep in later

Let’s go for evening walks

Let’s order wine

Let’s save our money by cooking at home and cancelling our travel

Let’s count our blessings

Let’s forget our Keto diets and enjoy some chocolate

Let’s watch movies together

Let’s Skype the grandparents

Let’s play games late into the night

Let’s host virtual slumber parties with friends we miss

Let’s raise two poodle puppies

Let’s go for a drive

Let’s go to school in our pajamas

Let’s attend anti-bias antiracist webinars with @britthawthorne and @amplifyRJ

Let’s do science experiments—outdoors, on our nature walks, whenever the mood strikes

Let’s go on virtual trips around the world

Let’s be thankful for the emotional bandwidth to stay flexible and not feel too overwhelmed

Let’s prioritize self-care

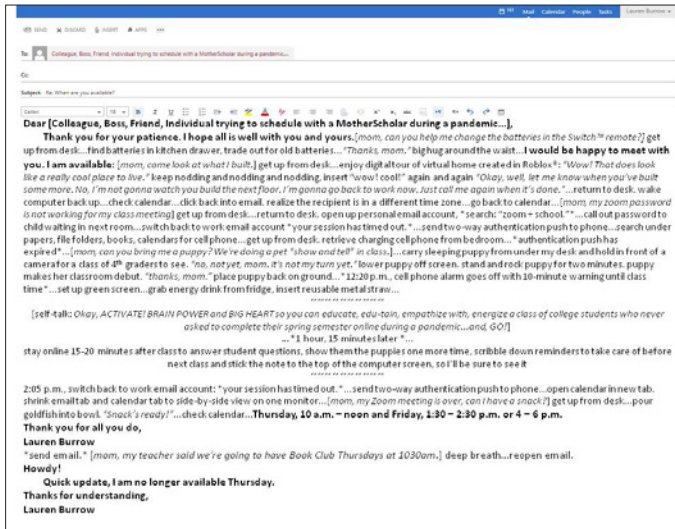
Let’s dye our hair pink and purple and blue

Let’s follow along and paint with artists like @jarrett_lerner and @cassie_stephenz

Let’s do stuff

... together.

Re: When Are You Available? The Long Process of Composing an Email during a Pandemic, Start Time: 11:45 a.m. (Burrow)



A mock email and an accounting of all the things that sometimes down occurred as I tried to compose a greeting, three lines, and a salutation.

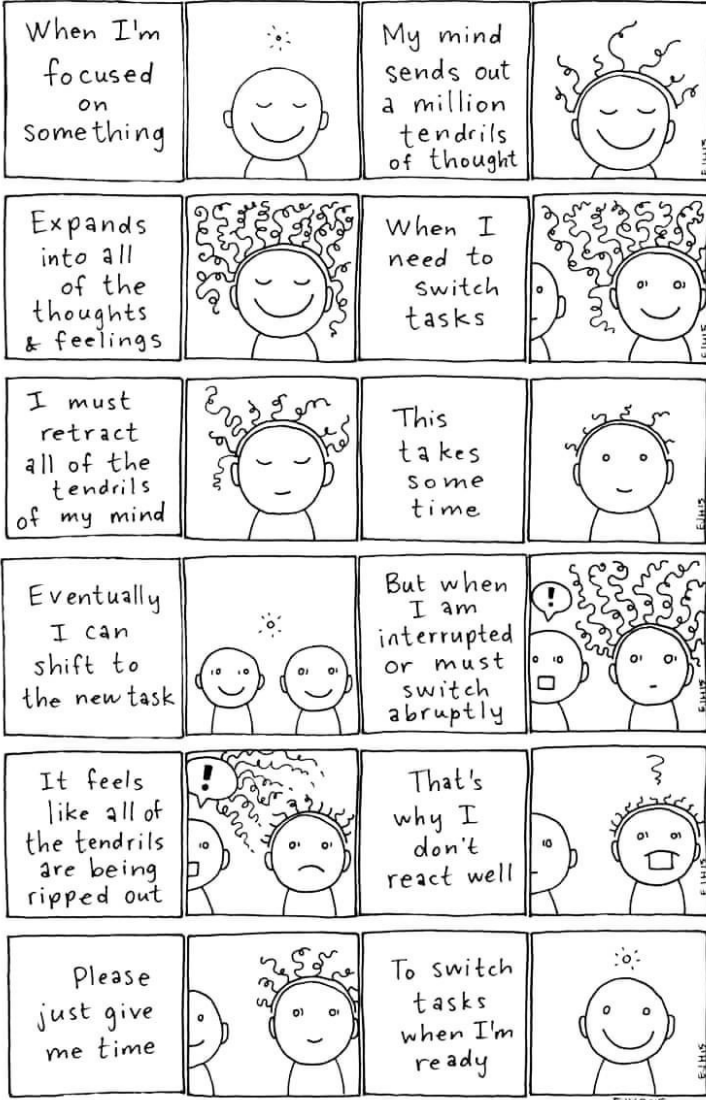


A visualization of the poem painted by my youngest son. He shows my path around the house as I move from my computer (top right) to helping him with online pandemic schoolwork (bottom right) to making lunch for his sister (bottom left) and back up to my green screen (top left) for a Zoom meeting. He titled the artwork: “At Once,” because he says I do ALL these things “all at once.”

How Can Words So Sweet Cause So Much Stress? (Burrow)

Inspired by a comic by Erin Human, with respect to the unique experiences of the autistic community.

Why it's hard to switch tasks (Let's call it Tendril Theory)



Comic strip created by Erin Human.

Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom

Will you come watch TV with me?

Mom
Mom
Mom

Can I say “hi” to your students?

Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom

Can we make sugar cookies together?

Mom
Mom

Look what I can do...

Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom
Mom

Come eat. I made *you* a lunch.

Mom
Mom

Do you want to play with me?

Mom
Mom

**I care. I really do.
But I can't do this right now.
I just don't have time to talk to you.**

Mom
Mom
Mom

WHAT?!

I love you

Haikus: A Series of Interruptions by the Children I Love (Burrow)

Although most interruptions felt like month-long requests for my divided attention, these were so often compounded by the many, tiny, constant and moments punctuating and interrupting my work from home efforts during these pandemic times.

These haikus capture both the dialogue expressed during and the discombobulating disruption felt as a result of these brief interruptions/moments encountered at my home-work desk. Some were spoken aloud, some were whispered in my ear, and some were scrawled on a scrap piece of paper and slipped onto my keyboard.

These are just a few of the many, many small ideas expressed to me while I was just trying to survive on screen.



The view that my children often see of me as they approach my desk to share something verrrrrry important with me!

*Here, mom, I brought you
twenty-seven cents because
you're working so hard.*



A quarter and two pennies. My youngest son's attempt to pay me so I could take a break from my salary-earning work and play with him.

*Do you think magic
is just science we do not
yet understand, mom?*

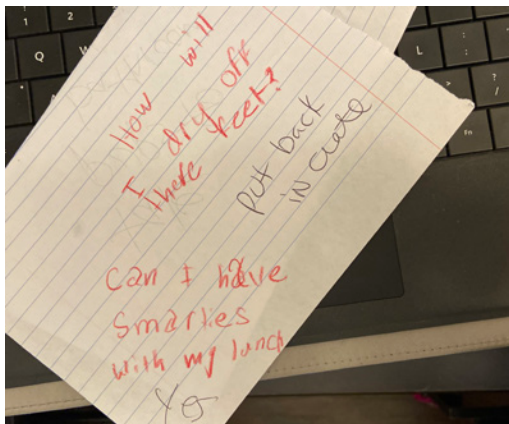


The Lego figurine that inspired my oldest son to muse aloud as I tried to prep for my teacher education course starting in twelve minutes.

Are you recording?

Can I make Ramen—yes/no?

Also, the dogs peed.



Sheet of scrap paper with ongoing notes written to me by my daughter while I was live Zoom teaching.

I made a Lego

*Look! She works **in** her home, too.*

Mom, she's just like you.



The Lego figurine my youngest son built for me to keep me company while I work. He made sure to include a kitchen, a closet with wardrobe choices, and, of course, a work computer in the middle of her bedroom.

This Pandemic Survival Was Sponsored By... (Burrow)

Inspired by Breckin Meyer's iconic speech as his character, Travis, in the movie Clueless (1995): "Thank you, thank-you. This is so unexpected. I didn't even have a speech prepared... But I would like to say this... tardiness is not something you can do all on your own. Many, many people had to contribute. I'd like to thank my parents for never driving me to school and the L.A. bus drivers for taking a chance on an unknown kid and last, but not least, the wonderful crew at McDonald's for the long hours they spend making Egg McMuffins, without which I might never be tardy. Thank you."

Orville popcorn, Lunchables, ramen noodles, Eggo waffles, and other snacks
my kids could make themselves

Oh, popcorn!

I hear your popping slow down, the pauses between pops as the timer
ticks down

The alarm, while jarring, reassures me that I have another thirty
minutes before they will

need me again

I find you left as kids scatter off to other rooms

But that where's you come in, *Fortnite*...

The creators of *Fortnite*, *Minecraft*, *Roblox*, and other video games that kept
my kids occupied

Oh, *Fortnite*!

Headphone-clad children screaming tactical manoeuvres to one
another from their respective bedrooms and our living room

into the homes of friends, teammates, temporary mission partners

Defeat is epic and results in the tell-tale screams and stomps of
frustration and tiny human rage

But, the sweet sounds of being awarded a Victory Royale mean it's
time to rest with the mindless distractions that pandemic brains crave...

Oh, Disney+, *Tiger King*, and all you streaming show services that provided
entertainment in a click!

Now, there is only the TV hum

A sound I can tune out, a sound I can work to, a sound...

...without which I might never had been ZOOM-ing.

I Wish My Work E-mails Would Talk to Me Like My Wine Bottles Do (Burrow)

Who checks on me? Who tells me I am doing a good job?

Here's the communication I wish I had read in an email from my bosses; instead, all I have is a found poem comprised of the uplifting words found on the backs of the wine bottles delivered to my doorstep during a pandemic via friends, family, and monthly subscription services joined as of March 2020.

Dear Lauren,

[You are] someone special; someone who stands out from the flock and follows [her] own path. A unique, original, and out of the ordinary [scholar]. You've got passion and perseverance.¹

[You are] someone who catches [our] attention.²

We are thankful [for] such a good find. [You add] a fun complexity [to your work, elevating it to] an art form [of] craft and creativity, aided by a deep knowledge within a disciplined field.³

All those who worked with [you know you are] destined to become a star. You are bright, fresh brimming⁴ with a focus on quality.⁵

You are a robust, zippy [scholar who] knows how to hold [her] own.⁶ Every bold woman [should] revel in the spotlight ... [and] be recognized.⁷

[So,] we felt [you] deserved [your] own time to shine.⁸

With gratitude, recognition, and support,

Your Employers In Vino Veritas



A collection of the corks that said the nicest things to me.

Stolen Moments (Burrow)

We get in the car

Cheesy bread ordered

Chinese food waiting for pick up

Bubble tea on speed dial

“Okay, what are we listening to?

Are we going to pick music to match our mood or make our mood?”

Do we need the Taylor that makes us cry? Or do we need up-beat, boppy Taylor?

Do we need to scream as bad-ass Women along with Kesha?

We drive down the streets with our only real destination being to pickup to-go meals

But the real reason is a chance to get out, to escape, to steal a moment for ourselves ... together.

We talk about nothing and everything.

We sing along and sit in silence.

We ask the big questions and laugh at the little stuff.

If the tears hit us, we let them flow.

This part was “fine.”

This part made us smile.

This part made us cry.

This part made us want to say a cuss word.

This part made us cuss.



My drive-around-town-just-to-get-out-of-our-house buddy.

We cuddle up on the couch
Splitting a Hershey's chocolate bar
We watch movies meant to distract us
Entertain us
Bond us

"How are you doing, mom?"

"You sound tired."

"You doing okay?"



My let's-share-a-screen-and-check-on-each-other buddy.

Surge Capacity, Part II (Burrow)

Inspired by a poetic prompt from Naomi Shihab Nye and informed by an article by Tara Haelle.

As two-weeks turned into two months and two months turned into twenty weeks and twenty weeks turned into... forever, I hit my limit, but the "you have to..." and the "you must..." never stopped coming. So, I cried. A lot. I mourned the loss of the little and the big; I grieved the unknown. We seem to have run out of "let's..." and it's feeling more like "less."

"I'm fine," just crying

Over empty peanut butter jars

About files knocked over by those poodle pups

Because the printer's out of ink and your online pandemic school work is due

I don't even know why!
while scanning schoolwork for upload
in front of all to see
when no one can see me

Just crying because—

Oh, wait a minute! Let me pause for this Zoom meeting

Okay, where was I. Oh, yeah...

I'm fine.

It's nothing

It's everything

I'm not fine.

But, mom,

I don't want to stay on Zoom to learn

I don't want to stay on Zoom to teach

I want to hang out with you

I want to hang out with you, too

I don't know how to do this math

I don't know how to either

I can't do this

I can't either

When coronavirus is over...

...can my friends come over?

...will everyone be okay?

When...

When.

When?

A Mother's Prayer for Her Black Son (Jeffery)

As if this global pandemic that put all of our health to the test
was not enough,

We also have to withstand the daily social, political, and racial unrest.

Lord Help Us!

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Lord please watch over my son and cover him with your mercy and your grace,
Protect him and guide him, this is especially needed because of his ethnicity
and race.

Any shades of black or brown skin just does not seem to have a place,

In this world, even after four hundred years of Black people being enslaved in
this country, and during these unprecedented times, racism is more elevated...
what a disgrace!

God, I know that this just isn't right,

But forgive those who do not see our humanity and hate us out of spite.

In your image, we are your creation and we know you love us and will see us
through despite

All of the disparities, biases, and cruel stereotypes.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Lord, thank you for all of the extra quality time you have allowed me to spend
with my one and only son,

But Lord, when he is out in public, walking or driving while Black alone,

Please help him to stay woke, be alert, so he does not become a victim.

Order his steps Lord and guide his path, protect him from all of the racist folk
and their wrath.

Remind him to please be careful, buckle up, drive the speed limit, and give the
police no reason to detain him.

Yet, I know because he is Black, all of that doesn't matter, because even when
one orders their steps, the police will do whatever.

BUT if he happens to get stopped by the police for any reason,

Please have him to remember all of the conversations we have had over the
years and many seasons.

Ever since he was five years old, a young boy preparing for these moments as
an adult, as a way to control

His anxiety, his nervousness, and to manage his fear,

Of not knowing what the outcome may be, Lord give him the strength to persevere.

Help him to help the police to deescalate the situation with all of your powers that be

And not react when incited or provoked, but remain calm, pray, and think of me.

Lord, please walk with him, talk to him, be intentional and explicit

Because I DO want him to come home and NOT be another hashtag or statistic.

For in this current environment and heated racial climate,

His Black body is considered disposable, underappreciated and lacking in humanity.

I know that I have taught and instilled in him pride, humility, and dignity,

And he is level headed, intelligent, and can articulate his thoughts very clearly.

BUT that doesn't seem to matter, the world is in an unbalanced state right now and crime and violence against Black boys and Black men is rife.

The thought of anything happening to my son fills me with anguish, hurts my heart, and pierces it like a knife,

Everyone in the world knows of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, and that it only takes one moment, one lack of humanity, eight minutes and forty-six seconds, to take a life.

Lord help US... help us all!

Help the world come together like never before to heal and to repair the wrongs of those who've perpetuated racial inequities,

Break down the barriers to systemic and structural oppression and tear down the walls of social injustices.

And Lord, please soften the hearts, the minds and the souls, of those that wish us physical, psychological and emotional injury, are my pleas.

BLACK LIVES MATTER.

My *son* matters.

We matter.

Amen.

"Poetry can help us have a window into someone else's experience or loneliness or difficulty" (Nye).

Conclusion

Since March of 2020, we have experienced new responsibilities in our personal lives and nontraditional expectations in our professional lives, yet none of the old responsibilities or traditional expectations of our homes and work have slowed down, been revised, or gone away. The only way we could keep up, the only way we could fulfill traditional scholarship expectations of Mother/GrandmotherScholarhood, was to produce nontraditional scholarship. Poetic inquiry provided us the method, the motivation, and the mattering to tackle the increasingly difficult feat of academic publishing as a mother and grandmother during these pandemic times. It is our hope that all moms can find the time to pause and reflect on the volatile emotions COVID-19 has caused them to endure. It is our hope that all moms have a space to share and be surrounded by social support even while physically distancing. It is our hope that poetry can be that time and space that other moms need to survive 2020. This is our hope, but we also know that some moms may need a lot more right now. Mothers may need their employers to understand their duality, may need their friends to check on them, might need their children's teachers to reach out to them, and may need society to see them because ...

Not Everyone Can Pause (When Pandemic Poetry Isn't Enough...)

(Burrow)

Informed by an article by the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA).



Instagram post by Kenya Adjekum Bradshaw (@KenyaBradshaw).

During a pandemic

some people panic (and that's okay)
 some people *try* to press pause (and that's okay, too)
 some people pout (you do what you need to do)
 and some professors publish poetry.

Some moms hold privilege and are surrounded by the support systems necessary to make the time and create the space necessary to process COVID-19, confront 2020, and to survive this new life that they never asked for.

But what about those moms who have to cry in the closet because there is nowhere else to feel all the feels??

who are so lonely because they have to cancel family trips, family gatherings, and weekly lunches with friends,
 who have a significant other and still feel like they are having to do significantly more than is humanly possible,
 who never wanted to be a stay-at-home mom,
 who are "fine"??

What would it look like for all of us to protect those moms who can't rest because their sons are being made into #hashtags by the thin blue line??

What would it feel like to show up those moms who transcend the gender binary, who are unseen, unheard, underappreciated??

What would it sound like to support those moms whose employers expect them to find child care for their children who are attending online #crisis-schooling in their own homes, because a mom's focus shouldn't be distracted by her home life as she connects to the work conference from her living room??

who are furloughed,
 working more jobs than ever before,
 unemployed,
 essential workers??

How can we ease up on those moms who are feeling guilty because their life isn't that bad, but it's still too hard to handle right now?

Perhaps we can...

...join them in protest

...demand a change in policy and practice

...sit with them, hand them a tissue, show up with cookie dough, and make

space for them

to pause

Perhaps ...

...we can publish their poems.

Endnotes

1. *True Grit*, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (2017)
2. *Oveja egra*, Sauvignon Blanc Carmenere Reserva (2019)
3. *Watchful Maker*, Sauvignon Blanc (2018)
4. *Norma Jeane*, Young Merlot (2004)
5. *Duck Pond*, Pinot Gris (2017)
6. *Rancho Campo*, Torrantés (2019)
7. *Embrazen*, Revolutionary Cabernet Sauvignon (MMXVII)
8. *Impress*, Petit Verdot (2017)

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