

A HOWL BOOK OF POETRY & PROSE

FACE MASKS & HAND GELS

A YEAR OF LIVING COVIDLY

HOWL

WORDS FROM AN 'INTERESTING YEAR'

**Face Masks
&
Hand Gels**

A Year of Living Covidly



"Start telling the stories that only you can tell, because there'll always be better writers than you and there'll always be smarter writers than you. There will always be people who are much better at doing this or doing that — but you are the only you."

— Neil Gaiman

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A **HOWL** Greeting . . .

It is a truism to write that the last few months have been ‘interesting’, with what started as a snuffle in Wuhan coming to define a year, and we suspect, the decade ahead. Likewise, as you would expect, the raptures caused by the pandemic have impacted on how we see and write about the world around us.

In the early days of the ‘pandemic’ in Siem Reap, as schools closed—the sight of cycling white shirts disappearing from the morning streets—businesses shuttered and family and friends left for (presumably) safer shores, HOWL chose to dedicate a page of its website to poetic and narrative expressions of our new time.

In the months that followed we received pieces from fields afar: from the distance lands of France and Panama, the closer conurbations and plains of Japan and New Zealand, and of course from our own Cambodia home. The page, ‘The Lockdown Diaries’, grew to be the most visited on our site, with HOWL aficionados clicking to see what others had to say about the strange new circumstance. This anthology presents a cross section of this writing, covering some of the most popular pieces that we posted on this page.

However this volume covers much more than the Covid experience, for while the virus will inevitably shape how we look back on ‘now’, there were other matters—some local, others broader—that have added colour and texture to the last twelve months. In acknowledgment of this you will see, turning to the first page, that we actually begin our ‘year’ in October 2019 and upon turning the last, we choose to end it in September 2020, a period which allows us to cover much more than just the shadow-casting virus.

To wit we start with events in early October 2019 when a Word Jam event at One Eleven Gallery, Siem Reap, brought together readers and an audience that had lay latent in the ‘Angkor town’. It permits the inclusion of other things too: the visit of the ‘grandmother’ of Canadian poetry to Siem Reap (Marsha Barber) and yet another One Eleven event; it provides room for poems about bush fires, a review of the HOWL ‘book of the year’, stories about making up and making out, and a whole lot of other things in between.

What all this demonstrates is the power of the word and the possibility that prose and poetry offer for communication and sharing. As humans we need this, because sometimes all we want to do is to cry, to bay at the moon, to HOWL.

So with the scene set we welcome you to our volume with the hope that you will find solace, laughter, perhaps a tear, from the words, paragraphs and verses that follow.

And please, always remember . . .

To keep on HOWLING!

Dr. Howl.



HOWL

HOWL WORD JAM 2019

Saturday October 5th 2019

Time: 7:30 - 10:00

One Eleven Gallery, Siem Reap

'Open-mic extravaganza'
Wordsters, poets and scribes

We will crown Siem Reap's
Spoken Word Artist, 2019

Register with Dr. HOWL at
wayne@songsaa.com

More at
<https://howlcambodia.com>

Follow us on facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/howlsiemreap/>



Libri & Verbis: Something in the Air

6th October 2019

The revival of poetry in Cambodia and beyond,

One Eleven Gallery, Siem Reap - Presage: It's 8:30 PM on a Saturday and One Eleven Gallery is humming. From across the traffic island a combination of applause, shouts and the occasional 'howl' chop through the humid night air; lines of rhyme and verse filling the monsoon twilight like word-lit fireflies, flicking and darting, invigorated by the will of an appreciative crowd and not a little amount of alcohol.

The HOWL Word Jam 2019 is in full swing, the gathered ensemble spilling out onto the verges of the footpath while, in the sky overhead, flashes of lightening forewarn of a late wet season deluge.

Inside, standing before the microphone, dressed in a long red sweat top, Nisha is regaling us with a poem that, twelve hours before, did not exist. A participant in a morning creative writing workshop, facilitated by *Writing Through*, her artistic energies have birthed a poem that unfolds like a beautiful wave:

*You are my Saturn, the ring around my heart,
You are my Mars; the fear is in your eyes,
You are my Earth; you are as lively as an angel.
You are my Venus, the goddess of love and belief,
You are my Sun, the light that shines on my whole world.*

With her last words still echoing from the speaker the crowd erupts with applause. Still standing Nisha appears shocked; unable to fathom, it seems, how words she has crafted can evocate such a reaction. She nervously covers her mouth and

gives an appreciative nod, while behind her palm a broad smile fills her young Khmer face, surprise giving way to delight.

This Thing Called ‘Poetry’

Poetry: What to make of this sanctified and other times maligned literature form, a word type that seems to navigate its way between peaks and troughs?

During its dip moments poetry can seem elitist and obscure, something clichéd and sentimental perhaps, writing that—either way— is irrelevant to the wider populous.

During its peak moments, though, poetry can seem like a tidal wave—a force inspiring and driving expression; a creative surge setting fire to the cafes, bookstores and performance stages and where ever else it can find a home.

More often, however, poetry seems to just meander, persisting with a resting heartbeat; known to those who value such things while the rest of us carry on with our lives.

Currently, though, poetry appears to be enjoying one of its ‘up-swing’ moments. In part this has evolved from the ease of online sharing and distribution, the typical poem being ideal for the attention span and cell-phone screens of the average reader.

Across Australasia, Canada and the United Kingdom this momentum has coalesced around a bevy of young female writers. They include Hera Lindsay Bird (NZ) who burned up the internet with her poem *Keats is Dead so Fuck Me from Behind*; Rupi Kaur, a 26-year-old Canadian-Punjabi, who dominated bestseller lists in 2018; and the slightly older Carol Duffy, the UK’s first female poet laureate. These and other women poets have attracted millions of online supporters, the

internet permitting them to by-pass the traditional male-centric publishing houses and capture a new range of attentive readers.

Poetry and the Kingdom

In Cambodia poetry seems to be experiencing its own moment of upward popularity. In truth there has been little where-else for the form to go, the period of genocide and civil war having gutted the country of the educators who had previously nurtured poetry in the kingdom's schools and universities. In the following years the necessity of family has encouraged parents to push their offspring into the commercial, hospitality and administrative sectors, depriving their progeny of the opportunity to explore poetry, even recreationally.

This is not to say that Cambodia has never had a healthy poetry community. Poetry was openly encouraged during the 'golden years' of the 1960s, the creative arts flourishing under the patronage of the late King Father, Norodom Sihanouk. During this period writers such as Kong Bunchhoeun—one of the revered poets of the era—moved between song and filmmaking, novels and poetry to earn their reil and fuel their muse.

Cambodia has also been the destination for numerous international poets, arguably the most famous being the beat writer Allen Ginsberg; the man who launched 'a million berets' with his signature work *Howl* (a poem that has part-inspired a certain Siem Reap-based word pop-up). Ginsberg travelled to Siem Reap in 1963, visiting the revered temples as part of a wider spiritual odyssey that had already taken him to India and elsewhere in the Far East.

Ginsberg, as poets do, chose to capture his temple experience in the long-form poem *Ankor Wat* (sic)—published by Fulcrum

Press, complete with photographs by Alexandra Lawrence—in 1969. It is a long meandering work that suggests Ginsberg partook in some of the local herb before his temple excursions. The beat master seemed to be particularly taken by Ta Prohm, the temple’s famous vista of intertwined roots and stone offering perfect fodder for Ginsberg predilection for druggy symbols and metaphors.

*The huge snake roots, the vaster
Serpent arms fallen
octopus over the roof
in a square courtyard-curved
roof combs looked Dragon-back-stone-scaled
As frail as stone is, this harder wooden
Life crushing them.*

(*Ankor Wat*, Allen Ginsberg, 1969)

Moving to the contemporary and the local, the current revival of poetry is being driven by developments at the grass roots, with organisations and learning centres, alongside the energy of motivated individuals, leading the way. Foremost amongst the former is the inspirational work of *Writing Through*, an NGO devoted to nurturing thinking skills, self-esteem and language fluency through creative writing, with a specific focus on youngsters from populations ‘at risk’ (besides Cambodia the organisation also works in Singapore and Vietnam).

In September a selection of poems by former *Writing Through* students was published in an anthology, the first such publication by the organisation, each of its collected works offering a unique window into the lives of its young authors – their hopes, fears and their dreams for the future. The book is a noteworthy achievement and a testament, not only to the *Writing Through* mission of “saving minds, one poem, one story at a time”, but also the dignity of the students striving for

a notion of the past and a future in the heartlands of the kingdom:

*I get a lot of problems in my life
But I never leave my dream
I'm not afraid of my mistakes
Life is short, make it beautiful.*

(*Love the way I Am*, Srey, 10, Cambodia)

A different contribution to the revival has come via the way of LiterTree, an enterprise featuring five 13 - 14 year-old female students from the Liger Leadership Academy, who have developed the computer app *Naeng-Norng* ('Rhyme and Rhythm'). The application works as a tool that budding Khmer poets can use to help them craft their work, its features including platforms for sharing and discussing poems, advice on poetry structure and even a search function that allows users to find Khmer rhyming words. In September the innovative worth of the application was recognised at no less a venue than Silicon Valley, California, where the app was awarded second place at the annual World Pitch event.

Elsewhere in the kingdom other individuals have made it their mission to ensure that the poets of old have not faded from sight. Significant here has been the effort by Puy Kea to collect and publish the works of Krom Ngoy (1864 - 1936), a man considered by many to be the father of Khmer poetry. Krom's importance to Cambodia poetry is underpinned by the experiences of those born and raised in the kingdom prior to the Khmer Rouge, where a common memory was the reciting of his poems by parents and teachers. Despite such significance Kea was disheartened to learn that much of Krom's poems were in danger of disappearing forever, with only a few tattered copies of his printed works remaining. Searching out what he could find

Kea, in 2016, published a single volume of Krom's poetry, the publication being widely distributed following its release.

A number of other Cambodians are making poetry waves that have gone beyond the kingdom. Kosal Khiev, 'Cambodia's Son' is probably the best known of the artists who have nurtured an international and local following, helped in part by the success of a film documenting his life as well as the man's infectious creativity and performance – few can tire of a Kosal Khiev open-mic.

Lesser known in Cambodia, despite achieving broad international recognition, is Lang Leav, a Khmer child of the Thai border camps who later emigrated to the more restive environs of Australia and then, later, New Zealand. In the Antipodes she found her voice and has published several collections, including *Sea and Strangers* and *Love Looks Pretty on You*. Leav's meditations on love, relationships and writing have found a keen international audience, especially amongst young adult readers—making her one of New Zealand's top selling international poets—much to the consternation of some of this country's literati who consider her musings 'naïve' and 'tweed'.

*I thought of you with
My heart already broken;
I thought of you
as it was breaking again.
I think of you now,
as I am healing.
With somebody new—
I'll think of you then.*

(*'Forever on my Mind'*, Lang Leav, from *Sea of Strangers*)

Having stumbling on two of her volumes in a popular Hong Kong bookshop—I had never heard of Leav until that point—I find her writing compelling and thoughtful; certainly more worthy of public acclaim than critical derision.

There is much more going on than can be covered here, with workshops, festivals and collectives sprouting up around the kingdom—some thriving, others not—as the muse takes hold. Poetry appears to be moving upward and it remains to see where this may lead, but for sure it promises to be an interesting ride.

One Eleven - Reprise: Jess gives a stirring recital that burns the state image of Singapore; Mick speaks of creativity in an accelerated age; Wayne remembers fallen heroes and Christie reminisces, but it is Sabhor who enjoys the most popular cheer of the night. Another graduate of the morning's *Writing Through* workshop, his assured delivery on the fate of a squirrel belies the nervousness he showed prior to his moment in the spotlight. At the night's end he is the resounding winner of the audience choice award, his beaming face joining his alumni colleague, Nisha, who is awarded the second runners up spot for her ode to the universe and love.

Outside the rain has stopped while inside the microphone has been switched off but One Eleven is still pulsing. This year's word jam has made us laugh, ponder, perhaps spring a hidden tear, but most of all it has made us HOWL – to cry out and celebrate words composed, given life and set free into the monsoon night.

Poetry is alive and well in the kingdom.





Libri & Verbis: Nurturing Creativity in the Kingdom

Sue Guiney, founder and CEO of ***Writing Through***, offers some words on what inspires her organisation and its vision of fostering education and self-esteem through creative writing.

'I'm not creative.' So many people have said that to me, and I'm always upset to hear it. They say it when I suggest they might want to write a poem or story themselves. They say it when I describe how I founded Writing Through, the international educational non-profit that uses creative writing to help develop thinking skills, language fluency and self-esteem. 'Oh, I could never do what you've done,' they say. 'I'm not creative.' But I say, 'Don't be silly. Of course you are creative. We all are.' We all just need the skills to unlock our creative impulses and the courage to try. That is what Writing Through does.

Twelve years ago I travelled to Cambodia with my family, and I fell in love – with the people, their fascinating culture, their beautiful country despite their tragic history. That trip inspired me to write a novel – I can't help it; that's what I do – and the publication of that novel, which is called *A Clash of Innocents*, and is now the first in a trilogy of novels, encouraged me to bring the creative result of that inspiration back to the country which inspired me. To do that, I offered a modified version of a writing workshop I had been teaching in the UK to a shelter for street kids in Siem Reap. Twelve years later, that one workshop has now turned into an organisation reaching thousands of marginalized and at-risk people throughout three countries in Southeast Asia.

We teach our workshops throughout Cambodia, Vietnam and Singapore, and we are moving towards expanding beyond the region, as well. And what is it that we do? We convince the people who participate in our specialized workshops that they

are, indeed, creative, plus we give them the tools to access that creativity. We then give them the freedom to express their creative thoughts in words, in English, a language they have often felt was far beyond their reach.

How do we do this? Over the years we have created and honed our programme of workshops, which take well-known, proven techniques and combines them in a way which encourages, empowers, and stimulates all within a fun and often silly environment. We do this through the magic of creative writing.

We at *Writing Through* know that experiencing the arts first-hand, and especially the literary arts of writing poetry and stories, is a key to developing thinking skills. So many of us have experienced the classroom as a place of fear. In our workshops, we take that fear away and replace it with fun and encouragement. So many of us have found ourselves in educational systems which are based on the rote repetition of information without having the chance to consider our own thoughts.

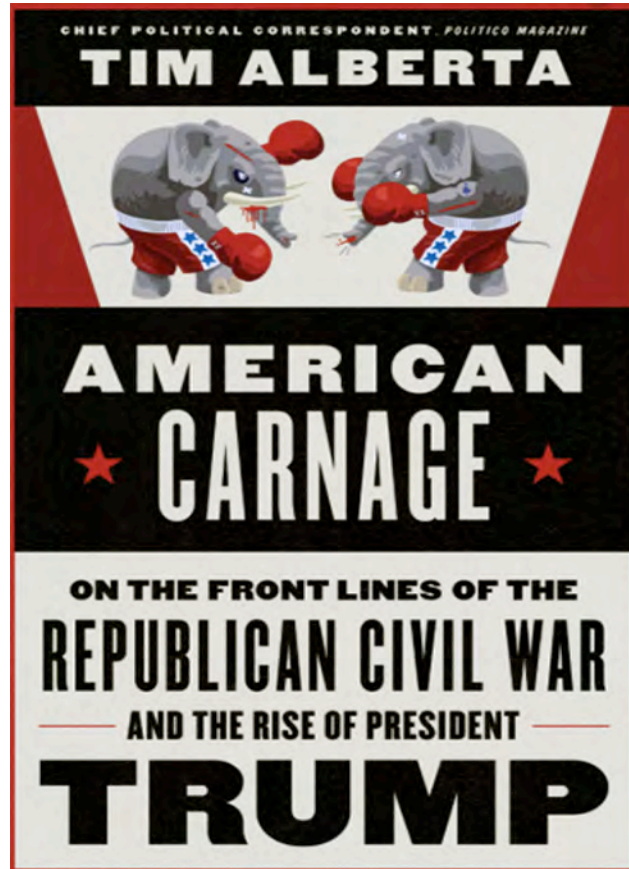
Instead of giving answers in our workshops, we ask questions, over and over, encouraging deeper, more creative responses. Too many of us live lives where the arts are a distant experience reserved for others somehow 'better' than us. *Writing Through* hands these people a 'magic pencil', a blank piece of paper and says, 'Go.' 'Try.' 'Yes, you can.' Then we give our students a forum in which to stand up and say aloud, sometimes for the very first time, who they are and what they think. That experience is life changing, both for the writer and for the audience.

The word 'No' is the death knell of creativity. To untap the creativity that is within all of us, we must first find the courage to say Yes. I have been personally lucky enough to have been

given the time, the tools, and the encouragement to say Yes.

In *Writing Through* our goal is to impart that gift of 'Yes' to all our students, regardless of their age, nationality or life circumstances – and we aim to do it, one poem, one story at a time.

Review: HOWL Book of 2019



“ The politician will be only too happy to abdicate in favour of his image, because the image will be so much more powerful than he could ever be.” Marshall McLuhan (interview, 1972)

Through the long journey across the primaries and into the US presidential election in 2016 it seemed unlikely, no impossible, that come January 2017 Donald J. Trump Jr. would find himself sitting behind the Resolute desk in the Oval Office. The consummate salesman, his skills honed through reality TV, it felt like a massive charade with we, the audience, waiting for the man to break into a grin, to offer a wink, before announcing: “just kidding folks”. I guess Donald was not in on the joke.

Over the last three years an array of books have been published detailing the rise of Donald Trump and the first years of his presidential term. Some writers—Michael Wolff’s *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump Whitehouse* is an example—have gone for the low bar; its hotwire into the Whitehouse, Steve Bannon (or ‘Sloppy Steve’ as the Trump now calls him) ensuring that the book was seldom threatened by scholarly intent; other publications—such as Bob Woodward’s *Fear. Trump in the Whitehouse*—have brought a reasoned and articulate analysis to the subject. In other cases, Matt Taibbi’s *Insane Clown President* is a personal favourite, writers have used gallows humour to detail the bewildering situation.

Tim Alberta’s *American Carnage: On the Front Lines of the Republican Civil War and the Rise of President Trump* is a different beast—and at 680-odd pages it has more than the hint of Godzilla about it—for at its centre lies not the president but the Republican Party; a party, Alberta argues, that Trump has captured and reshape into his own image: “*Rarely has a president so thoroughly altered the identity of his party. Never has a president so ruthlessly exploited the insecurity of his people.*”

This is a party known as much by its acronym—GOP (the Grand Old Party)—as by its Republican title; a political collective that begat us Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and ‘ahem’ Richard Nixon; and which, over the course of 150 years, has championed a conservative agenda of lower taxes / less government, free trade, the global world order (remember the Neocons) and strong families, all underpinned by a healthy dose of individual ‘can-do-ism’.

Now, in the space of eleven years—a period that predates Donald Trump—the party has become a proponent of state intervention, an isolationist foreign policy agenda, the subversion of tax laws

and personal freedoms, all underpinned by an alarming strain of nativism.

So how did this dramatic turn come about? It is a question that Alberta seeks to answer across the pages of his weighty, but seldom boring, tome.

The case: At the centre of Alberta's argument is the idea, foretold in the sub-title of his book, that the GoP has been at war with itself and its founding ideals – a conflict of ideas and beliefs that have transformed the party, leaving in its wake fertile ground for the likes of Steve Bannon and Donald Trump to grow and flourish.

So where were the seeds of this civil war first sown?

Ironically, given his *bête noire* status in the Trump universe, Alberta points the finger at the decision by the Republican Party and its presidential candidate John McCain, in 2008, to appoint Sarah Palin as his vice-president nominee (wholly under-qualified as a candidate, Palin was nonetheless reputed to be a deft-hand at moose skinning). It was, Alberta reasons, a fatefully decision that saw the GoP embrace the populist wing of blue collar, male America—a group increasingly marginalized on the fraying edges of the American dream—for the first time.

Writes the author:

“Practically overnight, Sarah Palin came to embody the most disruptive ‘ism’ of them all, one that would reshape the GoP for a decade to come: populism.”

[To be fair to McCain he wished to select Joe Lieberman as his running mate, but Lieberman's pro-choice stance on abortion made him untenable to the GoP base]

This is, of course, just a starting point. What followed was a grass-roots Republican 'revolution' that saw the rise of the rightwing Tea Party; the emergence of the 'birther' movement (supported by Donald Trump); and onward, the rise of Trump and his bulldozed path through the primaries, then his presidency and the three years of disruption, chaos and mixed achievements that have followed (as Alberta points out, beside a certain wall, Trump has been surprisingly successful in accomplishing his campaign pledges).

Personally I am not convinced by Alberta's claim that the Republican 'turn' is necessarily recent in origin. Rather I think there is a strong case to be made that it started earlier, in 1968, with the failed effort by the liberal Republican candidate, Nelson Rockefeller, to capture the GoP nomination (it was won by Richard Nixon). In this dramatic year the party's liberal wing found itself orphaned when Rockefeller imploded on the nomination trail, his demise heralding an uninterrupted era in which the party has failed, ever since, to nominate a moderate for president or vice-president. In short, the arrival of Nixon embedded a new ideological stance in the GoP, creating a conservative party in which moderates and their ideas remain marginalized fifty-one years on.

In classic 'civil war' style *American Carnage* recalls the tragedies and victims of the conflict: Paul Ryan, speaker of the house, forced to compromise his beliefs in order to steer laws through Congress; Michael Cohen, Trump's disgraced 'fixer', whose past financial improprieties were laid bare by the Mueller Inquiry; James Comey (Former FBI head), Jeff Sessions (Attorney General), and even 'Sloppy Steve' Bannon, whose love

of the spotlight was intolerable to a president who craves the centre of the stage. The fate of these individuals and others who fell foul of Trump indicate the degree to which the GoP has become subverted to his will – a president demanding undying loyalty with the power to disrupt and upend careers, families, stock markets, allies and enemies with a single tweet.

But Alberta shows that not everyone has gone quietly into the night. An example is Mitt Romney, a man who openly questioned Trump's nomination, earning him the now infamous tweeter storm, but who stood by his beliefs and returned to Congress as a junior senator in 2018. He is a man clearly out of step within the new Party of Trump (PoT), a Shakespearean Lear wailing against the excesses of his party's president.

American Carnage does carry some noteworthy gaps. Arguably the most important is an understanding of the cultural and socio-economic factors that provided the fuel for the rightward turn of the GoP. In fairness the scrutiny of these origins would require another book, with others have done a fair job of setting out the societal changes that have nurtured 'Trumpism'.

Personally I suggest George Packer's *The Unwinding*, J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*, Amy Goldstein's *Janesville: An American Story*, and for those prepared to go back a decade, Joe Bageant's underrated *Deer Hunting with Jesus*.

But even these writers cannot answer certain questions that, before reading *American Carnage*, I could not answer. Foremost here is the question of the support Donald Trump enjoys from fundamental Christians – backing that seems immune from his less-than-Christian indiscretions (Stormy Daniels and Access Hollywood anyone?). Alberta lays the answer out clearly in three words: Supreme Court judges.

To wit: by supporting the nomination of arch-conservative, pro-life judges Trump—a man who has personally expressed pro-choice values—has steered the American Supreme Court towards the holy grail of the staunch Christian right – the overturning of Roe vs. Wade (the landmark ruling protecting the constitutional right to abortion). With two conservative judges already appointed during his term and new appointment possibilities in the wind, a challenge to the ruling appears imminent.

Again, on the matter of campaign pledges, Trump can be said to have delivered. Yet in the background the words of Alexander Dubček, the de facto leader of the Prague Spring (Czechoslovakia) come to mind:

“To disregard moral principles in the realm of politics would be a return to the law of the jungle.”

And selling your soul comes at a price; a point made clear by the 2018 mid-term elections when a retreat of affluent suburbanites from the Republican Party helped the Democrats recaptured the House of Representatives. This trend, alongside an ethnic shift in American society, wherein the sum of minorities will soon outnumber the previous white majority, forewarn of telling times for the GoP. The risk for the party, Alberta reasons, is that Trump’s ethnic baiting could turn sufficient voters away from the GoP that years in the electoral wilderness will follow. It is an important argument that raises the question of what a post-Trump Republican Party may need to become in order to survive.

And what of the future for the other party – the Democrats – who have been energised by the arrival of younger, social media suave blood into its ranks. Here Alberta’s makes it simple: Trump will seek to demonise the party’s left-leaning

progressives by labelling them ‘socialists’, and then use this declaration to tarnish the entire Democrat party, and then watch as his ideologically unsophisticated base balk at a perceived ‘red’ threat to America.

It is a tactic that the older guard, Nancy Patricia Pelosi *et al.*, is seeking to deflect. Yet the appearance of these internal differences suggest that the Democrats face a milder version of a civil war themselves – one fought between its older, pragmatic centralist members and the younger, energized followers of the ‘new new left’. And without agreement on a shared path Trump, the artful tweeter of discontent, will use these differences to fracture efforts by the Democrats to recapture the Whitehouse in 2020.

But for the bulk of us, by-standers to this American tragicomedy, the situation can seem bewildering and nonsensical; yet we remain aware that our fate is entangled in this unworldly mess (think climate change and trade tariffs). Eldridge Cleaver, the African American activist, presaged this situation in his 1968 treatise *Soul On Ice*:

“It is not an overstatement to say that the destiny of the entire human race depends on what is going on in America today. This is a staggering reality to the rest of the world; they must feel like passengers in a supersonic jet liner who are forced to watch helplessly while a passel of drunks, hypes, freaks, and madmen fight for the controls and the pilot’s seat.”

Returning to Alberta’s thesis, in a 2018 TIME opinion piece Charles Skyes reasoned that political entities seldom lurch dramatically from one form of ideas and identity to another: “usually” he writes “it is a gradual process of compromises that make sense in the moment, but which have a cumulative effect – like a frog being gradually boiled.” The story

laid out across *American Carnage* suggests that this argument may only be half-true, given the changes that have occurred over the short period of the Trump era.

But correct or not Tim Alberta has done us a favour by setting out the paths that have brought us to our current point, while providing us with a sense of what lies ahead.

To end, if one wishes to find some comfort at the end of *American Carnage* it might be found in the past words of another American, the historian Samuel Eliot Morison, a man whose faith in the regenerative capacity of his nation's culture and its political system remained unblemished by historical events:

“ We have passed through abnormal periods before this, periods of disorder and violence that seemed horrendous and insoluble at the time. Yet we survived as a nation. The genius of our democracy is its room for compromise, our ability to balance liberty with authority. And I am convinced that we will strike a new balance this time, and achieve in the process a new awareness of human relationships among our people.”

Me? I'm not so sure . . .



BUKOWSKI never made it to SIEM REAP



BUT GINSBERG DID

FEATURING

Marsha Barber

Canadian poet + author extraordinaire

Scott Bywater

Poet Wunderkind

Heroes & Heroines

of Word Jam 2019

Open Mic

Monument Books

Poetry + Howl Books of 2019 on sale

HOWL

A NIGHT OF POETRY & PROSE

Thursday Jan 23rd, 2020

OneEleven Gallery

7:00 - 10:00 PM



howlcambodia.com

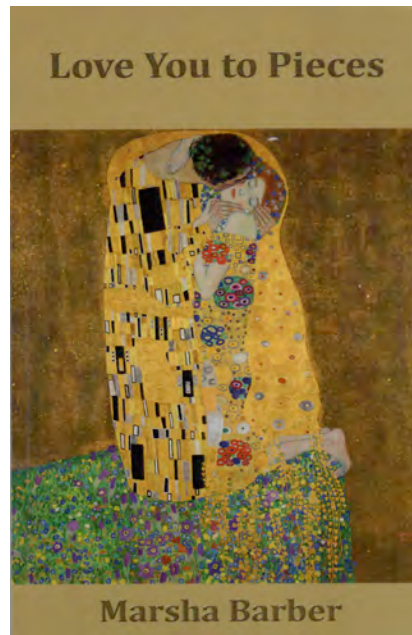
Events: HOWL Word Jam, 23rd January 2020

**‘Bukowski Never
Made it to Siem Reap,
But Ginsberg Did’**

In late January HOWL played hosted to two special poets—
Marsha Barber (Canada) and Scott Bywater (Cambodia)—for a
night of poetic mayhem at One Eleven Gallery, Siem Reap.

With additional readings from various ‘old souls’ as well as a
number of ‘new voices’ it was a night where the words and the
stars shone bright, a last hurrah—although we did not fathom it
at the time—before the Covid realities of February.

We feature two of the night’s poems here. The first was the
opening reading by Marsha Barber, a work from her latest book
‘Love You to Pieces’; the second a bush fire ode (more about that
shortly).



My Husband Drowning the Rats

Marsha Barber

I don't want to know the details but,
of course, I insist on the details:

How many rats exactly?
The mother? And four babies?
Five, including the runt?
And how
did they enter the laundry room?

When you filled the sink
with water from the rusted tap,
how long did they float?
Was the water boiling or cold?
Did they try to scramble out?

And when you killed the babies,
did the mother squeal?
Did her dark eyes meet yours?
Was she ready, then, for death?

And how, oh how, did you find it
inside yourself
to do this thing?

And what else don't I know
about you,
about us?

‘Acceleration’ . . . a Poem’s Story

One of the voices who could not make it to the January ‘Word’ event was the cousin of Dr. Howl, ‘John’. Now John could not make it for reasons that become apparent in the telling for you see John is from Australia and John is also a volunteer fireman, and in the weeks prior to the event, in fact well before Xmas, John was working on the fire-lines of East Gippsland, northern Victoria, doing what he could to save people’s homes, livelihoods, their lives from the bushfires consuming the ‘lucky country’.

But while John was unable to make it to our event his words did, in the form of a poem, and it is the origins of this poem that HOWL would like to share, here, for the first time.

As John tells it the poem was born after a long day on the fire lines—cutting breaks, lighting burn backs, hosing and hacking—doing everything possible to stop the bush fires consuming more of his state.

At the end of the day in question John and his team were directed to spend the night in a large farm shed, situated on the edge of a plateau (I write ‘shed’ but this particular building was more akin a small aircraft hanger, with an oval sloping roof, two large sliding doors, and a fresh coat of gunmetal coloured paint). And it was here after a cold shower, warm meal and debrief that John and his colleagues collapsed, exhausted, into their stretcher beds.

The only thing was, on this particular night, despite being shattered, well John couldn’t sleep. For, as he tells it, he could still feel the glow of the flames on his face, still taste the ash in his mouth and still smell the smoke in the back of his nostrils. And tossing and turning, until sometime after 11:00, John

finally gave up and rising from his bed made his way carefully passed his snoozing colleagues to the front of the shed.

Now on this particular night, on account of the heat, the building's large doors had been kept open, meaning John had an uninterrupted view across the plateau as he reached the shed's front. And there, silhouetting some gum trees, John was greeted by a sight that he will never forget. For before pulsed a vast orb of glowing red and orange light, a pyrotechnic sky, a forest-fueled lustrous sphere, filling the night sky from horizon to horizon.

It was at this moment, watching on at the power of nature—albeit aided and abetted by human ignorance, stupidity and greed—that John noticed something out of the corner of his eye: a piece of paper—A4 in size, burnt around the edges—wafting on the thermals of the bushfire conflagration.

Above his head the paper spun in the air and then gently wafted down and landed at his feet. The ever-conscious fireman John realised the importance of the paper, the fact that it could belong to someone whose home, business, even life, had been overtaken by the fire. So picking it up carefully he searched for some kind of identification, a name or an address, on the fire-borne sheet of paper; but there was nothing—the paper bare—with no a hint of its story on either of its sides.

It was now at this moment, holding the paper in his hand and looking on at the glowing sky, that John realised two things:

1. He was not going to make it to Siem Reap for the upcoming HOWL Word Jam event.
2. But the poem that he would write, on that particular piece of paper, would.

And you can read the poem on the next page . . .

Acceleration

(or)

Is This What Tipping Point Feels Like?

One tone-deaf Prime Minister

Two lightening strikes amongst the trees

Three embers bright and drifting,
harbingers on a warm breeze

Uncle Bob's house, car, garage and stable
afame beneath a shrouded December sky,

While five families huddle on a crowded and
gusty shore,
praying for mercy from the heat, the smoke,
victims of this new ash war.

Twenty-three family trees blackened, branches
and buds lost to this unnatural affray.

Thirty-four months and only
20 millimetres of rain.

A thousand koala joeys cremated on Kangaroo Island.
How much carbon did they ever emit?
How many lies did they ever tell?

Three thousand reservists called up on the 4th,
more men and women for a battle already half lost.

Ten thousand brave firies struggling on in the climate change
twilight, beneath 10 million hectares of flame-burned
silhouettes glowing in the hazy moonlight.

In the memory of morning choruses and dusk cries,
½ billion creatures consigned to the enflamed wind,

A billion words of denial,
one trillion tears of anguish,

Postscript

Politicians and prophets,
Aunt Claire and cousin Will,
as Tim Flannery once wrote:
'the reward for being right
will be embers in our mouths.'

For the homes of the denier and believer burn
just as bright,
Principles and truths rendered to cinders on
a burned forest floor.

In **Cobargo** a bookshop has a new sign:
'Post-apocalyptic fiction
has been moved to current affairs.'



. . . Lockdown Diaries

Lockdown Dairies: Dreaming of Taipei

12th April 2020

Greg McCann, rainforest memoirist and eco-wunderkind, offers his Covid thoughts from **Buffalo, USA**.

Only one thing matters: will my flight still depart on July 8th, taking me from New York—the pandemic epicenter in the USA—to Taiwan? That’s it, that’s all. This consumes me. There are other things, of course, like my son, and the fact that I’m putting on weight—and that really irks me because I have a gym membership and, considering how unhealthy the food is in Buffalo, NY, I was doing pretty good as far as staying in shape over the past two years. I can feel the bulge now, and jumping jacks in the basement don’t seem to do that much; neither do push-ups or sit-ups. Maybe I need to do more. Anyway, I scan the news looking for glimmers of hope that things will turn semi-normal by July, and I still think they will. Anything else is inconceivable.

My friend just sent me a photo of my favorite Taipei sauna, captioning it with “It won’t be long now, Greg!” I hope he’s right. He has to be. The bars and restaurants are still open in Taiwan. You can eat stinky tofu and wash it down with a Taiwan beer on the sidewalks of the city. Sounds like another planet, but that was my life for 14 years, and it will be my life again if I can get the hell out of here. I called the airline because my boss said I had better budget in 2 weeks for quarantine if I want to be able to report for duty on July 31st, plus a few days for a physical exam at the hospital. Airline changed my dates, but for a fee—thought they weren’t supposed to charge for that in these worrying times, but they did. Oh, and I have an ARC (alien

resident card) for Taiwan, so even if foreigners are banned, I can still enter. The latest news says overall deaths might not be nearly as bad as earlier models predicted. Looking good.

And it's not just Taiwan, but Cambodia and Thailand too. Because after I report for duty I'm supposed to be on another flight for my beloved Phnom Penh, and then up into the north of the Kingdom where I travel for wildlife surveying, and after that, back down to PP for R&R, and then a bus or plane to Bangkok, and then more jungle adventures in that fine kingdom.

Cambodia and Thailand should be OK by August, no? Is there anything else I should do besides some sit-ups? My son is on his third hour of Fortnite, or, actually, his first hour of that after two hours of some other game. But at least he gets to "hang out" with his classmates online while he plays. I hear them talking. Time to put on some coffee. It's 12:40 PM, Thursday, April 9th.

Lockdown Diaries: Evening Memories & Future Days

15th April 2020

‘Lockdown’ reflections from **Siem Reap** via the keyboard of **Dr. Howl**

The last night of December 2019: it seems an age ago now, a different time, another world, not a moment barely five months past. That night, with a friend, we found ourselves at Ms. Wong—as much of a hospitality institution as you can get in this town—with me enjoying a cool mojito as the festive sounds of Siem Reap buzzed around us.

Had I heard of the virus back then? A strange sickness in a distant Chinese city that I had barely heard of and that I struggled to pronounce? Maybe, a rumour or a brief news piece, but with Australia aflame and football scores to consider its repercussions—what it would mean for me and the rest of the planet—barely registered on this, the eve of new years.

Ms. Wong is closed now – a victim of the economic disarray that follows the virus like an evil twin. The friend from that evening is in lockdown, somewhere in Bangkok, unable to work, unable to travel. Today, on the last day of another new year—Khmer—Siem Reap should be buzzing. It’s not. After twilight one expects to see tumbleweeds spiralling down the dark alleys of ‘Pub Street’, with rats and lost souls the remaining vestige of the quarter’s wandering night-life.

Still, during the day, life seems cosmopolitan here compared with images from back home, the kingdom manufacturing a distinct take on Covid control. Currently we are in a holiday-centred lockdown, although the notion of where to place the

'lock' stretches to the boundaries of your province and not your back door. On the streets and out on the rural roads social distancing translates to three in a tuk tuk (chickens an optional extra) and 'flattening the curve' is something that a drunken reveller does in a speeding SUV.

In mood we seem to be on-hold, waiting for something to happen, spectators to an unofficial race – will we succumb to the virus first or will its economic consequences overtake us before? The local media provide us with scant details. While in Europe, the USA, back home, we read that the world is on fire, the 'bug' burning through people's lives, the economy, friends and family.

Last week, returning from work, I drove through the trees and ruins of Angkor. There were still people about—all Khmer, hardly a 'barang' to be seen—and they seemed happy, picnicking on the sides of the park's wide barays, taking selfies, juggling babies and soda cans in overfull hands. And if one closed out everything else, if one concentrated only on this moment, you could forget what was happening beyond, you could almost imagine that you were back on a mild evening in late December.

. . . that the world was 'normal'.

How will this all play out? I have little idea. But each day of good health seems like a miracle and, for now, that is enough.

Stay safe, stay healthy . . . and keep on howling.

Lockdown Diaries: Duet Between a Widow & Her Husband, Post
2020

April 17th 2020

A beautiful and powerful 'lockdown' poem from **Saarah
Choudhury**, a published poet from **Siem Reap**.

They say it's dead now, this ghost town,
Milkshake and coffee shop shut down.
Only police on foot patrol.
Webs of wyrdness in control,
But what to do?
But what to do?

Oh there are flowers in my lungs
Waiting to greet you when you come,
Hypnotic heavens set ablaze
The day angels upon you gaze,
And I'm still into you.
I'm still into you.

This world is bruised and bitter-sweet
Like dancing flowers on the beach,
Where we used to laugh and run.
Life outdoors was so much fun.
We'd watch each sunrise anew,
We'd watch each sunrise anew.

Oh there are flowers in my lungs
Waiting to greet you when you come,
Hypnotic heavens set ablaze
The day angels upon you gaze,

And I'm still into you.
I'm still into you.

There is no time like the past,
Who thought good things would never last,
Remember when the pink moon rising
We watched without moralising?
Now my world is blue.
Now my world is blue.

Oh there are flowers in my lungs
Waiting to greet you when you come,
Hypnotic heavens set ablaze
The day angels upon you gaze,
And I'm still into you.
I'm still into you.

Birds under my window sing.
We like to think nature's breathing.
In this isolated madness,
They only add to all the sadness.
Each day's so hard to get through,
So hard to get through.

Oh there are flowers in my lungs
Waiting to greet you when you come,
Hypnotic heavens set ablaze
The day angels upon you gaze,
And I'm still into you.
I'm still into you.

Now we're all afraid to fly,
Afraid to go on late night drives.
The streets are quiet anyway.
Mantle of fear's the mainstay

Yet I cling to thoughts of you.
I cling to thoughts of you.

Oh there are flowers in my lungs
Waiting to greet you when you come,
Hypnotic heavens set ablaze
The day angels upon you gaze,
And I wait for you.
And I wait for you.

Lockdown Diaries: Maheno School No More

April 20th 2020

“Hi, my name is **Emily Moss** and I’m 9 years old. I live in the countryside in **Maheno, Oamaru, New Zealand** with my mum and dad and my 6 sheep and Max the cat. I wrote this about my school and how lonely it might feel with no kids in its classrooms because of Covid-19.”

Let’s see what **Maheno School** has to say about having no kids because of Covid 19...

Emily: “ Ruru Room how do you feel about having no kids in you ?”

RR: “ I feel lonely, but happy because kids are not jumping on my floor!”

Emily: “Wow sad and happy. It must be so quiet at Maheno school in the play-ground. Tui Room what do you have to say?”

TR: “ Hmm...I can sleep in till 10:00am.”

Emily: “Thank you Tui Room let’s go to Pukeko Room, what do you have to...”

PR: “Well I am not lonely because I have two butterflies. I miss the kids working, but they are safe in their homes now.”

Emily: “ Well thank you Maheno School. Stay safe and this is Emily Moss for home school news”.

Dr. Howl: In a case of the past echoing today a note from Barbara, Em's mum: "Maheno School was named after the Hospital Ship 'Maheno', which took care of WW1 soldiers suffering from the Spanish Flu in 1919. The wreck of the Maheno is on the beach at Fraser Island, Queensland, Australia. The school has the original ship's bell."

Lockdown Diaries: Saarah's 'Duet': A Riverbank Reply

23rd April 2020

Julie Svay: Written from **Rueil-Malmaison**, the imperial city of Napoléon and Joséphine Bonaparte, near **Paris, France**, in lockdown and inspired by the emotions awakened by **Saarah's Choudhury's:** *'Duet between a widow and her husband, Post 2020'*

What words can I share after such lines ... ?

Lately, someone blamed me for three simple words of mine, "*I am fine*", because how can someone feel fine in such dramatic times? So many are in grief, fear or depression.

For reasons, good or bad, here we are; confined and little by little deprived of our freedoms – from going out (for more than one hour daily, authorized reasons only), from the warmth of gathering (so important to our elders), and to parks and places of green – our connections with nature.

Then, why not take the chance of these suspended times to reconnect with our profound beings? And through this inner journey face our shadows, and despite it all why not allow ourselves to reconnect with the beauty of each simple moment? And more than ever, the beauty of living?

It is springtime here, glycine and lilac trees blooming along the walls in the city gardens. Few cars pass on the usually congested and noisy roadway, allowing the breeze to bring scents of flowers and the sound of buzzing bees.

In the quietness of the evening I walk along the (forbidden) banks of the Seine. Sitting on a pier I send a prayer to its green

flowing waters ... a prayer of no religion but for our humanity, in the unexplained hope to fill the water with consolation and love; to carry along in its journey from the sea to the clouds, from the rains to the sources, and to the drinking water we welcome in our bodies.

Maybe it does not take more to feel fine. Maybe we can all learn, day after day. There must be lighthouses that stand before the dark and stormy sea, to remain us silently that there is hope until the Flower Moon light and the signs of dawn ...

On my way back there are cherry trees in bloom, like the trees that you see in Japan, with an old Mercedes car parked beneath. It's after a storm of thunder and rain and the vehicle is covered with pink petals, a 'wedding car'.

Lockdown Diaries: . . . the dream orchestra keeps playing the same tune

April 26th 2020

A poem by **Scott Bywater** - poet, writer and word raconteur of **Phnom Penh**.

the crowds are thinning
on the boulevard of cautionary tales
but maybe a new name is in order:
the street of the last chance saloons?
the avenue of the end times?
death-pat's graveyard?
(have I been reading Tom Robbins too much?)

if only beer wasn't half as expensive
as soda water
I think to myself
as I scratch the unshavenness
I am wearing to blend in

Monday has not traditionally
been a good day to start again
but so many of the old rules
are gone
and why wait for Tuesday?

as the street dwindles away
into shutters and sentries

~~~

one cannot help being impressed  
by the creators of email spam

who continue to work tirelessly  
through this crisis

the internet is our mirror  
both individually and  
our society  
all the things we are  
are in there  
blaring back at us  
staring back at us  
in piercing shards  
and loud lectures

our mythic heroes weep silently  
in their corners and their caves  
they are spent; they did what they could  
for now we are on our own

the bandleader up on the bandstand  
keeps calling up new titles but  
the dream orchestra keeps playing  
the same tune

the shadow protagonist  
his time called at last  
can only hack his way through the scenery  
in stubborn repetition of past roles  
on the same backlot  
high shimmering painted skies  
and smoke machines laid to waste  
as he stumbles forward  
incoherently shouting lines  
from his past triumphant speeches  
once there was not a dry eye in the house

now there is not a house  
not even a rickety chair

~~~

after the day-after-day morning bangclatter
the view from my window
is still and flatly hot
like childhood summer afternoons
when everything was distant
and the birds were the loudest thing
to be heard

when we walk the streets
the comparison with zombies
is hard to avoid,
with our mouth hidiers
firmly in place,
eyes working overtime in exaggerated expressions
to overcome the face wrinkles that
complete our brief exchanges

all plans mothballed
all bets off
all opinions bleated
all encouragements obeying
the law of diminishing cares

~~~

the streetscape edited  
erratically, but continually  
the familiar faces of these years past  
disappeared:  
home means different things to different people  
particularly when pushed

strange times, we nod sagely,  
as we quietly rearrange our priorities  
even as we wonder what they are

somewhere it seems  
our alter egos  
are off hiking in the hills  
picnicking halfway up cliffs  
waving bottles of wine  
at a different sun  
wondering where the glasses are  
wondering where the corkscrews are  
wondering where we are

all plans mothballed

all bets off

shutters and sentries

the dream orchestra keeps playing  
the same tune

## **Lockdown Diaries: Quarantined in Canton**

29<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**Faye Tsang**, who recently returned to her native **Canton, China**, after an extended Cambodia stay, and found herself in state-sanctioned isolation.

Finally I could set foot on the balcony of the hotel room and freely inhale fresh air, and then be on my way home real soon. Hearing the suitcase wheels rumbling down the sloping path leading to the lobby, I said to myself: *“That’s it... my 14-day mandatory quarantine is over!”*

It turned out not so bad for me though, a period of isolation at some five-star resort. Hotel-isolation was a special measure at the time to prevent Covid-19 spread, due to the many infected Chinese returning from abroad. Every one stranded in this situation would not complain too much for the luxurious and costly treatment arranged by the authorities, even if it had been confining and extremely boring.

This is my hometown, Canton or Guangzhou city, which is more expensive for living than many other places in China. However, many other companions who flew here from Southeast Asia to transit still had to put up with and pay for this quarantine as well.

Being fair here, you pay for what you get, (‘yes, I have to pay’), with pleasant accommodation in a tranquil and beautiful rural environment, tuned with birds singing. The team of hosts have been working very hard to meet our basic requirements – decent meals, mosquito repellent, toilet rolls, detergent, and more, all except room cleaning and customized catering.

And there was another team of medical staff from the district hospital, who has been working dutifully to carry out the day-to-day sterilizing and health checks, including virus testing twice a day, which was free of charge for us.

Friends of mine seemed very relieved for me having successfully left Cambodia, where the spread of the epidemic was unclear.

Yeah so far I was feeling very lucky, even when completing multiple road trips across Cambodia and a two-and-a-half-hour flight to Baiyun International Airport I seem to have avoided infection.

Fourteen days was going very peaceful and as regular as military drills. Yet for a solitary soul like me, it was not difficult to cope with, with reading, copy-writing (from my freelance job) to keep me busy; additionally with some help of an indoor exercise video that was introduced to me by a friend, and a shuttlecock – complimentary from the hotel.

The only human contact was eye contact and a Q and A session that happened during my daily physical check-up. Incidentally, the two-week isolation was largely in gloomy weather, which reflects the moodier spirit of the Ching Ming customary calendar period.

Thinking of the whole endeavour Chinese people have engaged in, especially the huge sacrifice of Wuhan folks, I gradually found the emergency rules of the authorities quite acceptable and practical, given imported infection cases have been increasing.

So you see, I am still able to adapt to typical Chinese socialism, even though I have stayed overseas for a long period.

Hopefully this global health crisis will soon be defused and overcome, through co-operation across countries no matter how different the social systems, race or political agendas.

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Fear and Hope in Phnom Penh

May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020

Words of reflection from **Phnom Penh** and the magic keyboard of **Steven W. Palmer**.

*“I felt a tremendous distance between myself and everything real.”*

– Hunter S. Thompson.

Self-imposed lockdown, Day...what is it again, Priti? Oh yes. Day Thirteenty fortytweleven.

To borrow another quote (and why not, it saves me writing), Philip K. Dick said: “It is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane.”

I think between Hunter and Phil, they have nailed this weird alternate reality we have not only plunged into, but plunged into willingly in most cases. Take a single Scottish exile with Cyclothymia (that’s Bipolar III to you lucky laypeople) and lock him away – voluntarily of course – in a large house with an equally large but fenced yard and watch the adherence to carefully constructed cycles of up and down slowly crumble.

For the most part, my view of the outside world is half-seen bodies passing my gate. For the other part, my link to reality is a slowly crumbling interaction with the rest of the world via social media.

Ah, the sword with two edges. On one hand, it provides a link to people you know and love. It can even offer respite in the guise

of ever-darkening memes (at what point does it become acceptable to laugh at death?). But on the other hand, you are also subjected to a never-ending downward spiral of conspiracy theories whose madness, for a moment, make you feel totally sane.

From that fairly predictable cycle of up and down, the world has shifted this cyclothymic writer into a chaotic unpattern (sorry, George) of morning “guess the mood” game shows. If I can avoid social media long enough to not see the increasingly orange face of the Trumpon or yet another 5G rant, then I might manage to make it to the coffee machine and allow that first caffeine – and obligatory accompanying nicotine – hit nurse me into either mild mania or mild depression.

Either version is preferable to a full-blown episode. I can try and find a point of focus – increasingly more difficult as paying work has disappeared – and coax my damaged psyche to deal with the day ahead.

Then there are treat days. “What are treat days?” I hear you cry enthusiastically. Those are one of the two days I deign to leave the house as a hunter-gatherer. Well, more of the gatherer since mammoths went extinct, to be fair.

Fully masked and goggled, I mount my trusty steed and ride through the village, ignoring the occasional suspicious glance from fearful natives. Enter supermarket, use hand sanitiser, wipe trolley handle with wet wipes, use hand sanitiser again, then off for a trolley dash – at respectable social distance of course – that Dale Winton would have been proud of (for our American viewers, think David Ruprecht, for Aussies, think Ian Turpie). List ticked off, fellow shoppers swerved past, non-mask wearing people scowled at, I make for the checkout, replete with

flexi-glass screen to protect the staff...or is it to protect the customers?

Despite the actual, real, truly tangible insanity of the supermarket, those little excursions represent a brief toe-dipping back into reality and sanity. As you ride in the – lighter than usual – traffic of Phnom Penh, you can, just for a brief 5 or 10 minutes, pretend that we are not all trapped in a maelstrom of fear and uncertainty.

You can pretend that you are going out for some beers tonight, maybe a game of pool, go for some nice food, flirt with the waitress, joke with the motodop drivers, gaze at the intricacies of social intercourse on the riverside, all those stupid little things that we took for granted...

I want those stupid things back.

*“To complain is always non-acceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.”*

- Eckhart Tolle

## **Lockdown Diaries: On Being 'Essential'**

5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

A 'word' from **Ross Sinclair, Wellington, New Zealand**, for whom the term 'essential service' has spawned a range of new responsibilities.

My day starts early. Usually woken by a ping from my wife's phone or her tapping answers to one. It is usually around 5 am, sometimes as early as 3 am. Odd numbers. I find odd numbers much worse to wake up to than even numbers, as if they are going to somehow throw my whole day out of kilter.

With these loud little noises, my wife is clearly breaking our pre-Covid-19 pact of no work phones in bed.

But a lot has changed.

And this is the least of it.

I get up and make her breakfast and a coffee. I know she knows how to drive the espresso machine but when I am in residence, she insists she can't stretch the milk.

I am an essential service to an essential service.

It is nice though, some early morning time together. I don't see her much during this lockdown. She usually gets home late.

She calls herself a public servant. She's working on the policy response to Covid-19 as a shift worker because they have so much policy to shift. She tells me they used to take weeks to write a cabinet paper, stressing over where to place a verb in a

sentence. Now it seems they have only a few days to stress over where to place masses of potentially infected people.

My wife leaves for work with all the other early-rising essential-workers, but rather than their day-glow vests and sports utility vehicles or buses or trucks, she's wearing a power suit and driving a small EV.

Very Wellington.

My wife is so grateful that I'm looking after the kids and cooking and cleaning and tears up when she tells me this. She's saving the fucking world while I'm vacuuming and she's thanking me!

I tell her I'm proud of her and I feel empowered by supporting her to do what needs to be done. I don't worry about it sounding condescending or 'cheesy' because it's genuine and one of Zoe's many talents is taking a compliment.

The kids get up later but don't expect coffee. They do expect sugar-coated cereal, somehow conflating lockdown with holidays and an increased chance of breakfast indulgence.

If it has been a 3 am start to the day, I tend not to sugar coat my responses to their requests.

I think the neighbours would report lots of shouting from our house, if they could hear anything over the din of their incessant power tools. The fervor with which they are doing it themselves suggests they don't realise that we're in this lockdown for the long haul.

Of the five residents in our house, Luna the dog shouts the most. She's just not used to sounds coming over the fence during the day. I recognise them as sanders and grinders and water

blasters. She doesn't recognise them at all, so she barks at them. And she barks a lot.

We are home schooling during lockdown. We had talked about me doing this if Zoe got a posting in the Pacific. Now I am getting to practice, and slowly getting better. I started off being more a janitor and manning the canteen, but slowly I am working my way towards teacher's assistant. My ambition is, of course, principal.

When the kids are busy, I catch up on emails and news. I find my way to a 'human interest' clip from CNN on YouTube. I cry and so does the interviewer. The news is not supposed to be like this. I stop it before it ends, like stopping a bad dream before it becomes a nightmare. I sit there remembering why I don't watch TV.

The day goes on: morning classes, lunch, afternoon classes, exercise.

The day ends how it began, just Zoe and me and her phone in bed. We listen to a podcast of radio news. They say the Easter road toll was zero. No one could remember when that had last happened, or if it had ever happened before. If it had, I bet it was during the Spanish Flu.

**Lockdown Diaries:** Piyopiyo...kasakasa-♪♪♭♯

May 7<sup>th</sup> 2020

The dawn chorus takes on a special meaning for **Yaeayi**, a **Japanese** native ‘locked down’ in **France**.

Like ‘other / previous’ mornings since Day 1 of this ‘world-famous / worldly-shared’ lockdown, around 7am several sprightly soprano notes commence tapping my brainwaves, and then my soul is introduced gently and connected to the natural world that lies outside my window.

I fix my ‘regards / looks’ onto the infinite horizon, infused with sky-blue, embracing the universe with a spirit of ‘Peace and Love’ that I have never felt before.

I defy the power of gravity on my eyelids and let my ears fill with the notes of harmony played by the precious creatures that remain free, outside, in the ‘Covid’ world.

The notes, sometimes, are like an orchestra composed with different players participating in a movement or symphony. Other times more like a soft ballad played on some plucked guitar strings.

Each night, before navigating my feet to my cocoon, I studiously wander towards my front window, in order to slide them carefully to make just the right space. This should not be more than 5-7cm—not too wide or it will allow in the chilled dawn air—but sufficient for the morning melody to make its way inside.

This night-time ritual is a new habit, borne of this 'lockdown' world, but one that has become part of it, *ingrained*. Now nature, not my cell phone, is my morning call; entering through the window and waking me each morning. Nature now has dominion of the land and sky beyond the glass.

So tonight like other days, I am wandering past the window, and preparing to dive deep into my blanket cocoon, wondering what notes will greet me at sunrise...

A new habit, a new 'normal', and one which I have come to hold precious.

PyunponpiiipoooSaasaasaa..... Piyopiyo...kasakasa-♪♪♭♭♯

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Headlines and Bylines

May 14<sup>th</sup> 2020

**HOWL** presents its esteem awards for the most interesting media headlines and bylines over these recent 'Covid times'.

### **'Justice of a Poetic Kind' Award:**

Shopper who used team to stockpile \$10k of toilet paper, sanitiser refused refund

RNZ, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

### **Puns: 'Oh dear' Award**

Selfish surfer's behavior far from swell

Stuff, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

### **The 'Not Keep Calm and Carry On' Award**

'Shambles, chaos, ridiculous': what the UK papers say about Covid-19 testing

Guardian, 2<sup>nd</sup> April

### **'Interesting Question' Award**

Coronavirus: Where will be the last place to catch Covid-19?

BBC.COM > News

**‘You Should Never Bake Your Covid Heroes’ Award**

New Zealand TV presenter ‘deeply sorry’ for her disturbing  
Jacinda Ardern cake

Guardian, 16<sup>th</sup> April

**The ‘Say What!’ Award**

Coronavirus: German zoo may feed animals to each other

Stuff 16th April

**‘The Purr-fect Headline’ Award**

You can’t leave that lion there: big cats nap on road in South  
Africa amid lockdown

Guardian, 17th April

**The ‘Headline that I Dream of’ Award**

‘It’s Over!’

## **Lockdown Diaries: 'Heroes' & 'Dickheads'**

May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Ross Sinclair—Wellington, NZ**—lays the groundwork for never being invited to another family BBQ, while sharing some thoughts about his country's Prime Minister.

When the kids are busy I catch up on emails and news. I find my way to a 'human interest' clip from CNN on YouTube. I cry and so does the interviewer. The news is not supposed to be like this. I stop it before it ends, like I stop bad dreams before they become nightmares, and I sit there remembering why I don't watch TV.

I get my news from Radio New Zealand—smart people asking other smart people insightful questions—very little 'human interest'.

I also listen to the Prime Minister's daily briefings, marvelling at how lucky we are to have a compassionate leader in such a crisis. If the centre-right National Party had been in power my friend, a monumental mason, would have been busy next year—twelve months after death—when families erect headstones.

My wife wonders if Jacinda is heralding a new era of compassionate female leaders? I hope so.

I don't feel compassionate, I feel bored, so I post on the WhatsApp group I share with my 10 first-cousins.

"Two questions for you dickheads" I message.

“I was wondering if the antivaxers among us will be lining up for the Covid-19 vaccinations when they arrive? And to the rest of you, how do you feel now about the years of chronic underfunding of the health system under National?”

I try and offend both ends of the political spectrum.

I succeed.

These exchanges always descend, rapidly, into me being abused; myself insisting that they should really listen to what I say as I'm the only cousin with a PhD.

This sends them apoplectic.

Mission accomplished. I go and make the kids a snack.

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Lockdown Canberra Style

May 25<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Philip Coggan** shares a ‘lockdown day’ from **Australia’s** federal capital.

Today is . . . ?

I forget. It’s Tuesday, I’m sure of that. But I forget what day it is in the count of lockdown days.

This is how I spent my day:

I ring my friend Gary. He lost his wife last year, but it was long-expected and he’s coping well. We’ve been meeting for coffee on the first day of each month but that’s on hold. He tells me he spent yesterday watching Netflix. He recommends *Detectorists*. ‘*Understated British humour*’, he says.

I go to Molto Italian restaurant, across the toy lake where I live. I like Molto, I like Italian. It’s doing takeaways only. All the restaurants are doing takeaways only. I ask Carlo how’s business. Business is ‘ratso’, he says. A man goes past carrying a glass of red wine. ‘That’s Pete’, says Carlo, ‘he goes past every lunchtime, with a glass of red wine. Don’t like to ask why’.

The day is sunny and windless and there’s a lot of people around – people walking dogs, people in cycling gear riding new bicycles, dads with small children, men of a certain age in sleeveless puffer jackets and flat tweed caps, groups of women of an uncertain age out for coffee in takeaway cups.

I go to the supermarket to buy marmalade. There's a homeless man begging outside in the sun, where it's warm. He has a hat in front of him with lots of coins in it. I ask him if he's alright, he looks unwell. Not corona unwell, but about to pass out from fatigue and/or lack of food unwell.

*Yeah.*

*What's it like?*

*Cold at night.*

*Where (I really shouldn't be getting into this conversation) do you stay nights?*

Mumble. The guy talks like he has a mouth full of cotton wool. I'll pass on that one.

*Are people being more generous?*

*No. They're tight.*

*Right.*

*Right.*

Back home I phone Greg, a friend in Sydney; he was in the middle of completing the purchase of a new house when the hammer fell. I ask him for news.

*'News is good and a friend from Melbourne is coming up to help with the move', he says.*

Melbourne? The rule in New South Wales is that you can't travel more than 50km from your home without good reason. I fear that somewhere north of the border a New South Welsh patrol car will pull my Victorian-plated friend over and ask him what the problem is, and I doubt that helping a friend move house counts. But I don't feel it's my place to mention this.

I watch the news. There's been one more coronavirus death in Australia, bringing the total to 97. Here in Canberra we have

one active case. Prime Minister Morrison offers us all his congratulations. Attention is now on getting Australians back to work. His personal popularity currently stands at 70%; pretty good for a man resembling a used-car salesman.

And so to bed. Tomorrow, as the man says, is another day.

## **Lockdown Diaries: Angkor Coronavirus Diaries**

26<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**Lisa Arensen**, riding out the coronavirus in **Siem Reap**, stays sane and open to the wonders of walking in Angkor.

### **Part I**

#### **The descendants of Angkor**

##### **I.**

They keep saying, in the papers,  
that Angkor is empty; but  
it is only empty of tourists.

It is inhabited by Cambodians, as it  
has always been. In fact, without  
the lumbering buses, the rows of  
tuk tuks, the crowds of visitors,  
Angkor feels reclaimed. There  
are families and lovers picnicking  
by the 12<sup>th</sup> century moats in the hot  
afternoons, wading in Sras Srang  
reservoir with their trousers rolled  
up, fishing off the sandstone steps.  
City folk cycle on every road and forest  
path, obsess over the troops of long-tailed  
macaques, and go up on their toes to pick  
fruit like the Javan plum. Brave young men  
play football, gleaming with sweat.

It's quieter, yes, and we who visit now are not  
quite like the foreign tourists or the ancient ones.  
Our modes of conveyance and our technologies

of communication have changed, but the descendants of Angkor are still here—walking, feasting and worshipping underneath their sacred trees.

## **II.**

I was on the south wall of Angkor Thom early one morning when I heard the singing. He was in the moat below me, a trap over one bare shoulder, a cast net slung over the other, and he called out to me and I answered back, and he said there were no guests for the boats, so he was fishing. I said I lived in the city and walked on, leaving behind a boatman wading in still clear water up to his chest, singing an ancient love song.

## **Angkor Coronavirus Diaries, Part II** **When death brushes closely by**

### **I.**

We were coming back from the temples at dusk, a wet sandy dog lying at our feet, and our tuk tuk swung around a corner and there was a woman lying on the side of the road with two men standing over her.

We pulled over by a roadside fruit stand, I found my latex gloves and went to see if I could offer assistance. She was conscious when I arrived, the others lifting her to her feet. They helped her limp across the road to the fruit stand as I quizzed her

about the nature of her injuries. Nothing was broken, she insisted, and she longed for Tiger Balm. So I got her some, and rubbed it gently onto her swelling upper arm. There was red dirt ground into the side and back of her pretty gauze blouse, which she refused to let me rip open to inspect her arm. There was dirt in her dark hair, and she was talking in that scattered startled way one does when death has brushed closely by.

The car's tire struck her motorbike. She toppled off to the side of the road rather than rolling under the wheels. The car, as is customary in Cambodia, was long gone. The other men were strangers like me, stopping to lift a fallen woman out of the way of more danger. She hadn't worn a helmet, she said, because she wasn't going far from home. She had five children, she owed \$10,000 to a microfinance institution, what would have happened to all of them, had she died that afternoon?

There was no lump forming on her head, only the injured leg and arm from where the motorbike landed on top of her body after the collision. She was lucky. So I left her there with my red Chinese balm, the vendors talking her back to calmness, and I remembered that death can wait anywhere—not just in the spiked proteins of this new coronavirus, but just there, in the shadow of the evening trees, around the corner, around the bend, just down the road between the market and your small wooden home.

## II.

Last Saturday, we stepped through the ruined sandstone pillars of an Angkorian bridge to see the river and stopped short.

Far below us, two young women lay side by side in the water, fully clothed, their bodies arranged upon small boulders. It was an eerie tableau. Their purses and shoes lay on the far bank, the clear water flowed shallowly over their feet and jean-clad legs, their faces were pillowed on stones, limbs tucked beneath them. They were still as death.

My companion thought she saw one's chest rise and fall, but I saw nothing, nothing but the gentle tug of the river on their clothes, the odd curve of one bare foot propped against a stone, and we could not leave them there, unsure of their fate, so I climbed down the bank towards them, and still they remained unmoving, until I was only a meter away and could no longer bear the silence and called out, Sister! And one girl's eyes fluttered open, startled, surprised, and she declared them both alive and well, simply two young women asleep in a shaded bend of the river three hours before noon. We left them there, hearts pounding.

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Bag Times at the Blue Parrot

28<sup>th</sup> May 2020

A brief tale of pandemic fiction from **Bangkok-based** writer, **Tom Vater**.

**Deconfinement:** They'd barricaded themselves in the Blue Parrot Restaurant. Neil, Brian, Amber and Eric. Long out of masks, the four friends could no longer go outside. There were too many infected. But they were starving.

No one would come and save them. The shortwave radio on the cash counter told them as much, perched next to a porcelain ashtray from Venice that featured the restaurant's owner's face. Guido. Guido was dead. He'd become infected weeks ago. Brian and Neil had killed him with saucepan lids and rolled him out of the Blue Parrot Restaurant.

In their defense, they'd been following government advice. Kill the infected. There was no vaccine. Anyone catching the virus would stop eating and keep spreading until they collapsed. If they collapsed. The authorities were overwhelmed. Business had long been shuttered. The media had collapsed. The Internet was gone. The Blue Parrot had been the center of the universe these past six weeks. At first, the food had been excellent. Then it had begun to run out.

Amber emerged from the freezer triumphantly, a large frozen bag of something in her hands.

*"I found something."*

The others looked at her doubtfully. They'd been through that freezer. They'd scratched even the moldy packet of durian ice

cream off the side and devoured it. Brian, Neil, Eric and Amber looked at each other. Brian was the first to speak.

*“That freezer was bone empty yesterday. Someone’s put that bag in there. We had a deal. We’re friends. We agreed to stick it out together to the end. But someone’s broken the deal.”*

Amber looked crestfallen. Eric had gone pale. Neil lit a cigarette.

*“Isn’t that your last one?”*

*“As you said, Brian, we had a deal.”*

Eric stepped to the radio and turned it up.

*“The Ministry of Health advises all non-infected citizens to stay indoors and wear their government issued masks. Our air force will drop an aerosol campaign on the city this evening at 6pm, in fifteen minutes. There will be a bright flash of light. Do not venture outside for at least two hours.”*

The announcement gave way to static.

Eric turned to Amber,

*“What’s in the bag?”*

*“Someone fucking cheated,”* Neil interjected again. *“Guys, we promised each other to survive together, keeping each other’s backs. Someone’s been eating and the rest of us have been starving.”*

*“What’s in the bag? Open the bag,”* Eric repeated.

Amber stepped up to the largest table, opened the bag and poured its contents on the shiny wood surface. She threw up almost immediately. Eric, Brian and Neil shrunk back as one. Perhaps not quite as one. But they all shrunk back. Amber was crying. No one said a thing. They'd promised to share. They'd also promised to keep their humanity. But one of them had failed.

Neil shook his head, disgusted or broken, and took a few steps towards the door. He looked at his watch and grinned sadly. Then he shrugged and raised his hand and turned.

*"See you guys."*

"No", the others shouted. He hesitated, then shrugged again, a gesture his friends knew so well. A gesture they loved as much as they loved anything about one another.

*"Well, every cloud has got a silver lining,"* he said and stepped out into the light.

**Lockdown Diaries:** Word of 'Lockdown Wisdom' from Someone Who Has Been There Before

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020

From **Isabell Sinclair-Irwin**, Lake Hawea, **New Zealand**.

I have survived two lockdowns and two pandemics, so far.

The first pandemic arrived in New Zealand during the summer holidays of 1947-48. I was 9 years old. The virus was called Infantile Paralysis. It mainly affected children, could lead to irreversible paralysis and up to 10% of infected children died when breathing muscles became immobilized: today we call that nasty little virus Polio.

When the virus cut loose in New Zealand, suddenly everything and everyone beyond our farm gate was treated as infected and could not come in. My parents were terrified I would catch Infantile Paralysis because I had been a 'sickly child'. By age 9 I'd already had pneumonia, double pneumonia (whatever that was - all I remember was either mum or dad watching over me 24 hours a day in my bedroom to keep me alive, and me feeling like I was on fire), English measles, German measles and whooping cough.

No antibiotics in those days only revolting sulphur tablets. And home-made soap. The homemade soap mum made - with carbolic acid in it I think - became double strength and almost took the skin off your hands.

Towards the end of the summer school holidays the Government decided schools would not open at the beginning of the school year. Every kid in New Zealand became a pupil of the Correspondence School. At that time kids living in remote areas

such as high-country sheep stations or lighthouses were pupils of the Correspondence School and received their lessons delivered in mail drops.

For 8 weeks at the end of summer 1947-48 my lessons arrived in large brown paper packages delivered to our mailbox by the rural delivery 'mailman'. Worksheets for English, maths, social studies and nature studies. Handwriting exercises, spelling lists, school journals, sometimes a library book, coloured pencils, pastel crayons and art paper (I loved the sticky coloured paper).

I was so excited when the package arrived in our mailbox each week. I could not wait to read what the teachers had said about my previous week's work and get into the new material. I worked so hard and enthusiastically that my weeks work was completed in two days and then my mother tried to think of things to entertain me. Being a girl in the 1940s activities for me were supposed to be knitting and baking. But I wanted to be outside.

There was plenty of space.

I was a farmer's daughter.

Mum had a much harder time motivating my brother. He was 3 years younger than me and much preferred being out on the farm, a preference that has lasted until this day.

This was life for me for 8 weeks before schools reopened, and the school bus arrived at our mailbox to pick us up.

I was reluctant to go back to school. I much preferred to pace my own learning and not having to go at the speed of others or be constrained by school bells.

My family was lucky because my brother and I stayed healthy. I did not end up in hospital like the pictures we saw of kids living inside a metal lung that looked like water tank tipped on its side. I did not lose the use of an arm or leg and have to wear a leather sling or metal callipers like the 4-5 kids at my school that got Polio.

My parents, who were so protective, had got me through my first pandemic.

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As we all know, my second pandemic arrived in NZ at the end of the summer of 2019-2020. I am 82 years old.

This nasty little virus has a much more scientific sounding name than Infantile Paralysis. This time it mainly affects the elderly. If we had given it a common name perhaps it would have been Mature Deadness.

When this virus tried to cut loose, suddenly everything and everyone beyond our garden gate was treated as infected and could not come in.

This time it is not my parents but me who is terrified that I will catch the virus. And just like before there is no cure but this time instead of caustic homemade soap there is hand sanitiser with aloe vera.

Just like the first time around, the Government decided schools would close but this time it is my granddaughters doing school by 'correspondence', while I am outside doing gardening like my father once did.

My son tells me the girls work hard and enthusiastically and get their work completed early. They must get this love of schoolwork from their mother, or me, they certainly do not get it from him. My granddaughters also cannot wait to read what the teachers have posted about their work – posted online not in a letter. They too were reluctant to go back to school.

By some quirk of fate I have been the vulnerable group for both pandemics in my lifetime: one at the beginning of my life that affected children and one towards the end affecting the elderly.

My family has been lucky again this time as we all stayed healthy. My government, and all those people younger than me who are sacrificing so much, have been so protective they have got me through my second pandemics, so far.

## **Lockdown Diaries: Sex (less) in the City**

June 5<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Joss McDonald**, resident and writer from **Siem Reap** ruminates on the meaning of ‘love’ in these discombobulated times.

Awww, Love in the Time of Cholera – Opps, I mean Love in the Time of Coronavirus. Okay, really what the f\* \*k am I saying?

There ain’t no love happening right now for a lot of us. Unless, of course, you were one of those lucky single people who found a mate on Tinder or Bumble by way of an original pick-up line.

Maybe it was a get right to the point one such as *“Come quarantine with me?”* Or the more cheesy *“The only thing not quarantined is my heart when I look at you?”* Or a naughty one *“The Coronavirus might have shut everything down, but I’m still open for business?”* Perhaps a practical one, *“I’ve got plenty of TP and food- want to bunker down with me?”* Or the so bad it’s good line *“If the Coronavirus doesn’t take you out, can I?”*

There’s amazingly been quite a bit of success with lines like these, as well as plenty of new-ish relationships where people suddenly shack up together. So much so, The Edge radio station I stream from New Zealand has featured a few time slots about this new cohabitation phenomenon.

Here’s the thing – you either move in together, or you won’t see each other for at least a month, maybe two, or really who even knows?! How could anyone say no to moving in with someone they’ve been dating only a few months when the lust and passion are at it’s height?

Or, maybe you're like me, and live in a tourist town devoid of any but approximately three, three tourists right now! Oh, and most of the "eligible" single expats have left too. Which means that, yes, you guessed it, we will not, for the foreseeable future, be having any sex in the city.

I know for some of you, it won't bother you too much. Alright, I'll survive too, but there's nothing like an impending warning to bunker down for an undisclosed amount of time to make you really wish you'd found your Mr. Right – or at least a Mr. Right Now.

There's still one or two guys coming up on Tinder here a day and I think a few over. I recently matched and have exchanged messages with two who have been keen to meet. Sure, we can do a "social- distancing" date over coffee. I mean, how does that work?!

Are we supposed to sit at separate tables across the room from each other? Maybe we could write our questions on notes of paper, like in primary school, and get them passed back and forth by the wait staff- sanitizing our hands in between? Or, bring personal-sized white boards and markers to ask our questions on? Shit, but then I'd need to wear my glasses to see that distance! Ughh!

At what point do we not have to sit six feet or six meters, or whatever the new safety standard is, apart? Maybe every date we can lessen it by one foot, and if we have six successful dates, we can now finally kiss? And eventually (cover you ears mum and dad) have . . . . !

What if you don't live alone? As whoever lives in your house is part of your "bubble", that person will now have to pass the bubble test! What would the bubble test consist of?

1. Can cook?- You'd definitely want someone who can contribute to that.
2. Knows how to use a mop/broom/vacuum?
3. Has good handyman skills?
4. Is eager to play board/card/drinking games with your family or flat-mates?
5. Isn't a screamer! Yes, you might want to be having great sex, but nobody, and I mean nobody in your house wants to hear you! – Especially if they are single! \* Note to self: Ask if they are a screamer in the above social-distancing date questionnaire.

Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself here, as unfortunately, I have no prospective Mr. Rights in sight. Okay, yes, I have had two guys ask to meet, and so far I've met one. He was nice, good at conversation, but there wasn't any spark. Now, more than ever, I feel like there's huge pressure on the date for it to be "all or nothing". There's got to be that almost instant chemistry and connection, because there isn't time for it to build. However, just because we're both not able to leave the country and there is an impending lockdown, doesn't mean it's automatically "Love during Coronavirus". So, as they say, next!

I still have one more guy I could meet, as we're not in a state of emergency lockdown here, yet. I'm not holding out a lot of hope, however, as my gut feeling is telling me he's not my type – although he loves dogs, and has already said he wants to quarantine at mine because I have one. Anyway, it's okay, because I'd rather quarantine alone, then with the wrong guy out of desperation. Just in case, I'm prepared – if not, well there's always Netflix. What better time for a Sex in the City binge-watching marathon, than for the next few weeks?

Samantha my girl, I'm coming for ya!

## **Lockdown Diaries: An Unbearable Likeness for a Nature Cam**

12<sup>th</sup> June 2020

*'Hope is a thing with feathers'*. **Dr. Howl, Siem Reap**, shares a note from parallel worlds

The nest is empty now, its wide platform of sticks and leaves vacant, bare of feather, talon and beak; around the sides and in the middle a few bones remain, the discarded lives of mice, moles, something larger, growing brittle and white under the mid-summer sun.

I started following the Decorah Eagle's nature cam in early March – remember life back then? A time of Covid fears—uncertainty growing like the numbers infected—businesses shuttered, travel plans cancelled, the world moving inward, the future unknown.

In these anxious times finding the website was a 'beautiful discovery', its peep into the live world of two nesting American bald-eagles offering up respite from the outside world. There, on the centre of my computer screen, sat a tall and stoic eagle, attentive and alive, sheltering three eggs beneath its puffed out chest: something solid and firm, with focus and a clear mission. Too easily I was hooked.

Over the next three months, from March to now, my life has followed two parallel paths. One a pandemic journey, the virus blasting through Italy and Spain—in Washington, the 'powers that be' denying and gargling blench— New Zealand in lockdown, Britain differing. The other an eyrir-world with two clear tasks at hand: hatching and raising three eagle chicks.

The first few weeks were the time of the eggs, the eagle pair taking it in turn to keep the three white ovals warm and dry. Back in my Covid world I was storing up food, converting currency into small nominations, and working with a district governor to setup an emergency clinic, the pair of us pondering where we might store the bodies.

In mid-April the eggs gave way to chicks, the cam showing three balls of fragile and sleepy fluff one mid-week morning, the hatchlings looking small and naked amongst the sticks and detritus of their tree-top home.

In my parallel world Khmer friends, jobless for two months, wondered how they would repay their micro-loans whilst, across at the temples where their ancestors once stood, the grounds were eerily quiet – Angkor reclaimed by a spirit of stillness.

By late May the three eaglets—they had all survived—were looking much stronger; acting like preening teenagers, tired of the nest and wanting to break free; but novices to flight, unable to do so.

Until last week that is when, after a few days away I clicked on the eagle site wondering, as the Mac wheel spun around, what I might find. The answer: nothing! Not a bird in sight. My eagles had flown.

My feelings? Firstly sad and disappointed but then something else, a measure of relief and joy that the eggs of March had endured; and that the seeds they once held were now soaring over the plains and hills of Iowa, terrorizing rodents, rabbits, voles and whatever else befalls their keen raptor eye.

Meanwhile back in my native Aotearoa June has brought a different relief; a semblance of normality returning inside the nation's borders. People are standing next to each other and shaking hands without fear; touching, hugging and kissing (not too much of the latter, it is still a country of emotional restraint).

This weekend rugby will return to the nation's stadiums; crowds once again assembling before stages of grass and dramas of strength and agility. I imagine that the grounds will be full, each game—in a very Kiwi way—a celebration of having passed through the Covid eye.

And just this once I wish I could be there.

So in this moment I feel happiness and gladness for my birth place and the eagles of Decorah. And to those here to read this, I am glad for you too.

Kia haumarū

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Lockdown Virus Blues

**Peter Olszewski**, a writer and news-hound from **Siem Reap**, offers a satirical take on the latest Covid news.

June 17<sup>th</sup> 2020

Commenting on the most recent development in our Anthropocene epoch, John said that he read somewhere that Bill Gates was behind the Covid virus, because he was developing a vaccine so he could dominate the globe financially – although he already does dominate the globe financially John added – noting that he read the bit about Gates and the vaccine somewhere and then adding that he doesn't believe anything he reads anywhere anymore whereas Michael said that he read that high temperatures can keep the virus at bay although that information is being stifled by global leaders living in cold temperatures and/or Donald Trump, or at least that's what he read somewhere although Michael adds that he doesn't believe anything he reads anywhere anymore, while Caroline, well Caroline is convinced Trump has a lot to answer for and that the virus is a dire warning about the catastrophic dangers of environmental pollution caused by radiofrequency radiation and electromagnetic fields as evidenced by 5G which is now being actively rolled out in many cities around the world and which hijacks your sweat duct antennae via pulsed waves far more damaging than continuous wave radiation and in fact 5G is a weapons system disguised as a consumer convenience, or so she read, and Michelle butted in saying she read that someone from WHO – almost certainly a woman – said that Jacinda Ardern should be running America, even though she – Jacinda Ardern – told CNN's Christiane Amanpour that she didn't understand America and meanwhile Donald Trump, furious that Ardern has trumped him by having far

better virus numbers, said that he made Ardern up and if she's not careful he'll turn her into a sock puppet, with Bob then bobbing up saying how it's all just a chance to reset humanity, despite the proliferation of photo-shopped pics of swans and dolphins on the Thames or the Ganges, and despite statements that are false at a quantum or supposed non dual level and despite the kick-in of the entropic chaos factor when suddenly Sandrine interrupted screaming WTF would everybody just shut up about the stupid Covid virus thingy or whatever it's called and get on with it and leave her alone because she's sick of hearing about it and she certainly no longer reads about it because she doesn't believe anything she reads anywhere anymore.

You know what they say. You wouldn't read about it.

## **Lockdown Diaries: A Covid Perspective: Hong Kong**

25<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Ms. J**, from **Hong Kong**, reflects on how the ‘virus’ has changed her city home, sometimes (perhaps) for the better.

Never would I have thought that at the start of 2020, a “World War Z” feeling would spread across the world! Without blood, without running for your life, without Brad Pitt, but you know it is all around you! The anxiety, the panic, the restrictions, constant reminders of self-protection and the dramatic death rate around the world. Getting on the train you could suddenly be in life threatening danger! The fear of death was never so close!

People in HK are considered lucky. We were one of the first infected cities, in early 2020, but never suffered a lockdown. Local government established various measures to fight against the virus but the people in HK are, still today, free to go around.

Everyone is conscious of wearing mask and sanitising hands whenever they can. There was a wave of panic buying of masks, sanitiser, toilet rolls, tissue paper, any type of noodles and rice, bread, canned food. Empty shelves in supermarkets and the lack of daily masks was the talk of town for many weeks. But then it stabilised pretty quickly.

With our SARS experience in 2003, HK people knew when to wear a mask in public. It is perceived to be a responsible and life-saving act for yourself and for others. It is impressive that every Hong Konger is so aligned with this belief that you will not see anyone without a mask in public, even with the currently hot weather and 35 degree temperatures.

But we do question, will this become our way of life?!

Nevertheless, westerners living in HK did not wear masks in the early stages of the pandemic. We cannot be sure whether they thought we were over-reacting or that the virus only targeted Asians. At that point, there were minimal cases in the western world. But since the outbreak started in Europe and North America, the whole cycle of panic buying, empty shelves in shops and the mask wearing debate has happened in these places too, and so the westerners started to understand why we do what we do, and began wearing masks.

Cultural differences disappeared and we all knew that we were in this together.

The combined effort of government measures and people's behavior seems to have paid off. The number of confirmed cases and deaths in HK has remained low.

Meanwhile, with the pandemic induced closure of factory operations in China, the ever-polluted air quality in HK has improved. Even the ocean is clearer. People are more alert about health and diet, bonding more with their loved ones, there is more home cooking fun, more efforts to see nature – everyone in HK seems to be at ease with the pandemic as long as we all behave! Amazing to see such a pleasant outcome from such a difficult situation. Would this ever have happened if there were no pandemic?

## **Lockdown Diaries: A Covid Diary: Panama**

June 30<sup>th</sup> 2020

*“It feels like a dystopia movie . . .”*, a very personal account  
personal account from **Anon, Panama**.

I wake at 4:30 AM to drink water and walk to the window. It’s dark outside and the faint street lamps illuminate the neighborhood. The only sounds are those of small birds in the trees that shelter them. I take a deep breath and go back to bed before another day of lockdown begins.

It is hard to imagine that three months have passed and how much all our lives have changed. Back in mid-February with my partner and our widowed mothers, we boarded a Caribbean cruise for a week of enjoyment. Later, on our own, we embarked on a 1000-kilometer road trip around the countryside of our tropical country, Panama.

There was news of a strange epidemic, far away in China, where thousands were falling to a mysterious illness. But no one was worried here, after all we had already experienced epidemics before—dengue, zika—and made it through okay.

And then things started to escalate. There was the unexplainable sudden death of a school director in the capital city; his co-workers following him to hospital, some in grave condition. The government tried to downplay it. The school board muttered but there was no way to deny it, COVID was among us! Quickly the number of infected people started to climb in Panama city.

Still travelling we decided to prolong our stay in the countryside, our evening’s backstopped by a nightly press

conference tallying positive cases, hospitalized people, the mounting death toll.

In the days in between we took a daylong road trip across plains and mountains to a remote surfer's beach. While there the government announced plans for stricter measures, but they would still leave the airports open so more infected people could arrive from the USA, Spain, and Italy.

We were supposed to spend a few days in a beach resort. Now a virus borne from across the Pacific severed our long-awaited holidays. A curfew was in force and we could no longer walk the streets. In our capital the situation was getting progressively worse; and while there were a few reported cases in the countryside, there were none recorded in the province where we were staying.

The holidays were over. Being independent I had no safe way to return to our home in the city. Yes, sometimes government takes half-baked measures without thinking; and yet it took weeks before they decided to close the airport. We spent a whole month in the countryside, afraid to come to the city.

Now I find myself here, in our cozy apartment but unable to go outside and enjoy the sun. All social and economic activities have come to a halt. As an independent I am only allowed to be out and about for 2 hours, twice a week, within a specific time slot. While a ritual follows the rare excursion to the outside world where the 'virus' resides. Leaving shoes outside and spraying them with chloride, washing your hands feverishly before touching anything and then stripping away your clothes before taking a shower.

Life in Panama has taken on the feel of a dystopia movie; a time and place where simple acts—coughing, touching, laughing—can have grave consequences.

Our lives will be different from now on. Nothing will be the same again.

**Lockdown Diaries: Sakura Au Revoir**

12<sup>th</sup> August 2020

The flower pedals are gone but life goes on – a poem from  
**Hiromi Morimoto, Yatsushiro, Japan.**

Every year we went  
Kagoshima, Kumamoto  
Or some other place  
Mum, dad, sister and brother  
Together for once, a family in one space.

But in these Covid times the tradition was broken  
And there were no blossoms in March  
No dappled pink in the chilled twilight  
Or sakura picnics, warm saki and bbq  
Beneath a pink pedal rain

Instead, in the year of the virus,  
Delight and wonder gave way to fear and Nippon staidness  
Everyone seeking to go with the flow  
By not going anywhere  
(Except to work – we are, after all, still Japanese)  
Stuck in our rooms  
Prisoners inside our own beige walls.

But it's over now or so the fireworks say  
But so are the blossoms  
Resigned to memory after the hard days of spring  
So I must pray that my parents will be here next year  
To enjoy the opened buds minus masks and Covid cares

And once more we will mark our spot  
And celebrate life, family and re-birth  
A clan united under the branches  
And then I will know  
That this time has truly past.



## **Lockdown Diaries:** View from the Wunderbar

August 12<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Matt Davie** offers some post-lockdown reflections from a favourite bar in **Lyttelton, New Zealand.**

Before New Zealand went into nationwide lockdown, without trivialising the terrible and widespread effects of Covid-19, an occasion was, for myself and a few others, a pre-pandemic drink. Prime Minister Jacinda (known affectionately by her first name by all) had just announced that there was evidence of community-based transmission of Covid19 in NZ. We were about to move to elimination level 4 and for the following 6 weeks all but essential workers would remain at home in their own 'bubble'.

As myself and five others sat on the balcony of the Wunderbar, on that Thursday afternoon in March, we contemplated, among other things, that we may not see each other for a while. Worst case scenario, a number of us may catch the Covid 19 virus – at that stage a distinct possibility given how our curve in New Zealand was following a similar trajectory to countries like Spain and Italy. Then there was the issue of job security – I myself being fortunate (depending on your point of view) to be classed as an essential transport worker. Another companion was lucky to have just received a commission for a couple of paintings. And another supplied most of her sunglasses online anyhow. Even though we knew that hugging, as part of the new social distancing rules, was no longer allowed we embraced following a few anxious drinks, and then went our separate ways.

The Wunderbar is situated in the Canterbury port of Lyttelton and is well known for its retro chic'ness, bohemian lounge décor, ambience and clientele. I've been to it many times over the last 30 years – to music gigs, birthday parties, the millennium new year's eve and post-earthquake shows in the 2010s. These days I travel to the Wunderbar by ferry – it's a five minute trip across the water from my base in Diamond Harbour, a small village opposite. From the balcony of my home I can see the twinkling lights of Lyttelton and on a clear night might spy the Wunderbar's neon. But for a couple of months its lights went out and during the day there were no sail boats, kayaks, wakas or jet-skis on the harbour – just the eerily, wind-less conditions of a dry April and May.

Now a mere eight weeks later I am back at the Wunderbar, on a Saturday night, a first tentative outing since the lockdown restrictions were eased. There's just a small scattering of early evening drinkers, all quite subdued – I sense still shell shocked from what has occurred in the last few months. A companion and myself start chatting to a couple opposite, joking at being able to share a missing condiment. Next door, the Irish bar usually full of rowdy after-work revellers, is relatively sedate. After some welcomed drinks we move on to a local Thai restaurant for our first dining-out experience in ages.

Now, talking to strangers and/or neighbours is, I suppose, one of the positives to come out of the lockdown. Many people have commented about how much they have enjoyed (some would say loved) the six weeks off from work. Other workers, such as those in government departments, have been allowed to do their work from home. People have exercised a lot—walking and biking—while talking to people, friends new and old, from opposite sides of the road.

At 10.30 on a Saturday night out, friend and myself board the ferry and head home across the harbour. As the vessel turns out of Lyttelton's inner harbour I can see the smoky haze wafting above from 100s of log burners. And as we continue to move further away we can also see the smog haze of Christchurch rise from behind the Port Hills. For 8 weeks, as traffic disappeared from our roads during lockdown, this haze vanished. But now the cars, traffic and people have returned.

## **Lockdown Diaries: GTFO ASAP**

**Joshua Clayton** contemplates a long stay in Siem Reap after failing to GTFO (Get the F\*\*K Out).

Come for Angkor Wat, stay for the entertainment! Stay for the food! Stay for the arts and stay for the people! Stay longer! Those were the words we plastered over Social Media, pinned on our website, and poured into search engine algorithms, an impassioned plea for every visitor to do more than scratch the surface of this captivating country.

In March, Covid-19 rammed everything into reverse. Borders were closed. Flights were grounded. Insurance was invalidated. Leave now! Leave quickly! Leave by any means possible! This was the new mantra. We scrambled to help everyone return home in the midst of restrictions that would change by the nanosecond. Covid-19 was spreading; a drop of ink into water, ever-extending its shadowy reach across the world. Every tendrill that touched down was another flight cancelled, another entry requirement, another change of plan for our guests.

Flights booked through Australia were revoked by mid-morning, transit in Bangkok closed by the afternoon, repatriation flights full by tea time. At every turn the shadow of Covid was a step ahead, waiting for us. Success at reaching Singapore was sullied by being trapped in transit, options vanishing into a now quiet sky, empty of aircraft.

Embassies and consulates alike stood frozen, hopelessly repeating advice unfit for such unprecedented times. Leave quickly was easier said than done. Nonetheless we worked, toiling thankless hours away to help our guests out of the country. Upcoming arrivals were

postponed, seemingly indefinitely.

The lucky ones lost savings on holidays cut short. The unlucky lost weeks bouncing between airports and quarantines in a desperate bid to get home to what they might have thought was safety, only to find Covid had arrived first.

Now the visitors are gone, and those who remain wait with shuttered shops, barren bars and empty email inboxes. It seems, we at least, are staying longer.

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Dancing with Mortality in the Time of Corona

September 7<sup>th</sup> 2020

A near-death experience raises a question for **Luke Hunt**—international correspondent and author— *‘should I stay or should I go?’*

### **Part 1.**

“... my life review – a euphemism for near death experience or NDE – really didn’t do it for me.”

As the new coronavirus took hold about 100 people were doing what they do best, sorting a barbecue, the last to be held in the garden of House Nine on Street 830 in Phnom Penh, my home for the last eight years.

Old friends and the odd luminary – famed correspondent Jim Pringle among them – indulged in a hedonistic mix of food, music and intoxicants of choice on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

It was on the eve of lockdowns. Government quarantines, social distancing, face masks and must have sanitizers were still over the horizon. Hugs, kissing and the odd dance were still allowed.

Two weeks later I collapsed with severe abdominal pain, fever and volcanic chills.

My doctor, Gavin Scott, listened to my gut with his stethoscope and said: “I can’t hear anything at all. Nothing.” Gratefully, I couldn’t feel anything either but the look on his face said too much.

My organs were shutting down as I was rushed into ER at Royal Phnom Penh Hospital then five hours later into an ICU with suspected salmonella or typhoid as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, up-ending and closing-out life as we knew it.

Dr Kraipope Jurapaiboon got it. As my internal organs were nearing retirement he did the charts. A stomach inflammation reading of one to three is considered normal, five is high.

I was clocking around 265.

The ICU resembled a NASA control room. Ten electrodes connected me to the EKG. Three intravenous needles delivered a milk substance and antibiotics. There was a catheter, assisted breathing and four or five staff on hand 24/7 as I drifted in and out of consciousness.

Needles and blood tests followed more needles, more blood tests and CT Scans.

Kraipope diagnosed salmonella leading to complications, which included pneumonia with pulmonary embolisms in both lungs, peritonitis, thrombosis on the liver, kidney stones and diverticulitis resulting in a perforated colon.

That infected my stomach and sent me into septic shock, twice.

Blood was turning into sludge and clots, of which I was blissfully unaware. The morphine – a must have at the next barbecue – was terrific.

But as the bells and whistles sounded from my ICU, I instinctively knew exactly what was happening and I was ready to go. I also had the best view. I could see Kraipope, another

doctor and a team of nurses dart to my bedside. I was impressed.

I was looking at them from just above, then drifted towards the window as my life review, also known as a near death experience or NDE, began to rewind through a montage of black and white photos.

It was entertaining, I liked my life but like too many of the photographs I'd taken over the previous decades my NDE was in large parts dreadfully out of focus. There was a light that ran in a curve out through the window and up, and I was overwhelmed by a comfortable urge to follow. Just go.

I hesitated for a nano-second. My life review looked a bit clumsy. It lacked clarity. It was a bit like my old school report cards: "Could do better".

Then I thought of friends and family. Mum had passed barely 12 months earlier leaving a tribe of grandchildren behind and I didn't need to add to their anguish by bugging off so soon afterwards.

Last and least, I didn't want that concrete skeleton – the Booyoung construction site next door – to be my last picture of a planet blighted by environmental destruction.

I shot upright. Literally; awake, thoroughly alive and totally aware.

END OF PART ONE

## **Lockdown Diaries:** Breaking Needles in Broken Veins

September 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Luke Hunt** questions those who query the rights of the elderly in the second part of his personal Covid account.

### **Part II.**

“Covid, senicide and shades of Hitler in the ranks of the self-entitled.”

Near death experiences are not that uncommon but doubts over the veracity of such stories are understandable, particularly in a world riddled with self-righteous petty indignations and expressed all too loudly as the new coronavirus took hold.

But as I awoke there was a second doctor who was watching over me and with a reassuring smile he reminded me to thank Dr Kraipope for saving “you, you nearly succumbed twice”.

Asked whether I had contracted Covid-19 – at that point the diagnosis was incomplete – he laughed, saying: “Nooooo, you're four, five, six times worse than that”. Hardly encouraging.

The following days, weeks and months were difficult. More blood tests, more needles. I actually ran out of veins. They were all broken. My weight dropped from near 90 kilograms to under 70.

I was locked down in hospital and then home for about two months amid a crazy mix of symptoms that were similar to Covid-19; respiratory issues, blood clots, pneumonia.

My only access to the outside world was a television fixed on CNN and the Internet where the plight of the human race was

unfolding as the new coronavirus took hold and leaders like the US president Donald Trump crashed to an unprecedented level of incompetence.

Covid-19 was the common cause, lockdowns were enforced and the world as we knew it flipped from great freedoms to house detention and it continues to bring out the best, and the worst in too many people.

But what stunned me, were the horrible attitudes expressed about old people as if some kind of Darwinian experiment was being played out through the new corona virus. I never realized so many people simply didn't care about their plight.

Scorned and blamed for quarantines, right wing twits were prepared to put business before health as one Texas governor suggested grandparents should be willing to die for the sake of the economy.

In the online world – where every expert, every idiot and everyone in between can express themselves badly – such attitudes are all too easily amped-up.

In Australia and the Covid hotspot of Melbourne, one on-liner points out that total Covid deaths announced for Victoria today were one female in her 80s, three females in their 90s and one female in her 100s, and this does not justify lockdowns.

That prompts responses like: “Mate, just because they were old, doesn't mean their lives are worthless.” and then: “Why not ban death hazards altogether. No cars. No skateboarding, cycling, hijinks or hipsters. Then we can all die of nothing.”

The attitude is ‘people should ignore the science, do as they please and if the elderly die off a bit earlier than they otherwise

might have then that's an acceptable price to pay so that the rest of us can carry on as usual'.

There's a mangled argument in there. A sizable minority are saying the elderly are too prone, too inconvenient, too expensive, and too old to treat. Unworthy of care, besides they're going to die soon, anyway. Expendable.

But why stop there? Why not just abandon all help and hope for the elderly in all circumstances, relieve society of their burden and everyone else can go to the football or do as they please.

That would remove awkward questions like who decides who dies and when. It's actually called senicide, a disturbing, Hitleresque word which means the killing of elderly or their abandonment to death, which makes the issues that exploded out of lockdowns with the stir-crazy protestors of the Black Lives Movement look rather petty.

Humans don't do Darwin, animals do. Humans - perhaps not all - have ethics and culture. That's how we sort out the bullies and how people look after society as a whole. I never did get to the other side so I can't vouch for it but at 57 I went close.

I'll be forever grateful for the doctors, nurses and the caring people who helped me, whether I last another 10, 20 or 30 years. They were professional, ethical and served according to the needs of the patient. It's the type of care all people should be entitled to, including the old.

There could be exemptions. Those advocating senicide come to mind.

END OF PART TWO

## **Lockdown Diaries:** How Much Longer?

A poetic contribution from **Jess Blackledge**, which asks a question that we can all appreciate.

Don't dwell too much on the concept of time  
rebirth of the daffodil  
Or rising of a phoenix  
Stop checking your watch  
Or holding your fists up to the sun  
Don't blow the seeds off the dandelion

It's on your side, so the 'Stones say  
Or maybe  
Better three hours too soon than a minute too late  
Time and Tide wait for no man, apparently  
so pay it no mind.

How much longer  
Until we can embrace  
How much longer  
'til we can see the full outline of a face

Baked some bread  
Deep cleaned the bathroom  
Had a wee snooze  
Learned a tune on my uke  
How much longer?

Nails tap on the desk  
Like the scuttle of a beetle  
My restless leg shakes  
Patience is a virtue  
My grandmother used to say  
It never was my forte.

Ate the bread  
Couple of zoom meetings  
Watched a film  
It killed some time.

I'll do the same tomorrow  
Trying not to glance at the clock  
A watched pot never boils, you know  
I won't make too many plans  
for a time when  
we can meet again.

When I was young  
A mate told me  
"if you stay really still for long enough  
You can actually feel the earth rotating"  
I tried  
It only made everything seem slower.

**Lockdown Diaries: Walking the Dog**

Long time Phnom Penh resident, **Marianne Waller**, is in **Adelaide, Australia** from where she offers this reflection on being finally allowed out to walk her dog after lockdown.

Posh cars,  
Leaf-drift locked –  
we are all dog-walkers now,  
filling bags with  
breath held

**Lockdown Diaries: Coved Convenient Catalyst**

A Covid poem from **Jamie Rossiter**

Never have so many had so much while so little was owned by so few.

Oracles and riddles tell us their truths, in times of plenty the ear hungers for sweetness,

For blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the debts of bondage given by the prominent to lesser.

Not wasted are opportunities by better men, for they shall inherit the narrative,

As clocks strike thirteen we are thankful in a time of charity for our needs are few,

Yet never has so much been given to so few

Never again will we dare to dream, dare to ask, dare to think us equals in the eyes of some

The line of the queue is serpentine leading to the future, for those who thought too much too high

Never was so little owned by so few, with so little with so much, Deukalion and Hellen our brother and sister know us well

**Lockdown Diaries:** Siem Reap, August 2020

**Scott Bywater** offers his reflection on Covid-blighted **Siem Reap**, after attending an August HOWL Word Jam event

Walking in the old town  
that I first knew  
wishing that I could afford all the  
massages and tuk tuk rides I am being offered  
though they need the money more than I:  
they ain't selling too many elephant pants these days  
  
the less the throng  
the more the space,  
and once the sprawl had stretched  
the bounds of containment  
but now there's too much of nothing  
  
shutters/house for rent/gone  
  
I wander behind my nose  
guided by disjointed memory:  
13 years now of  
when was I at this place,  
with which beer  
or which coffee  
or which margarita afternoon  
and with who?  
my past Siem Reap tour companions,  
I wish you well  
so far down the line  
  
the surface is like a lined,  
lived-in face;  
outward signs of  
an inward struggle

folk still mill around the food vendors  
sprinkle through the mobile coffee stalls  
but deep in the market it's cold and still

Cambodia, it appears,  
continues to take its beatings  
with a shrug and a shy smile,  
consoled by family  
ritual  
karaoke  
beer  
and endless snacking  
for those with a couple of thousand riel in hand

but surely I project –  
I really know so little of how it all works,  
with my dozen phrases and  
ability to count as far as 20  
as I continue to hope to find  
the half of one percents  
that might contribute  
day by day  
to my chosen Cambodian families

so it's another day of staring into the future  
with hopeful heart despite,  
remembering that one day  
this day will be  
one of the memories  
that I will recall

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# Poetry Corner . . .

**Libri & Verbis:** A Note for a Friend

By **Nisha**

Just keep in mind, you're not alone

There's people who will pick up your phone

There's even people who would notice your tone

You are yourself , there's no other clone

**Libri & Verbis:** Deferment Love

A love born in these **Covid** times, something secret but not so hidden. **Anon.**

**T**his poem is dedicated to a writer,  
Someone whose voice and words would make everything I say  
sound like a stutter.

Engineers aren't necessarily good with words,  
So I'm sorry sweetheart, if it sounds absurd.

You walked into my life as if you're never going to leave,  
For we talk about everything but grief.

You give new meanings to sunsets, foods, and places,  
We watch the sun goes down and as we slip into each other  
embraces,  
We eat bagels for brunch on Saturday,  
Counting the hours we have left—to our dismay,  
We have a latté at our usual place,  
As I look in your eyes and caress your face.

Baby I think we're a match made in heaven,  
I can be your Jane, and you can be my Rochester,  
I will always be by your side— just like her.  
Looking past your imperfections,  
Wanting to be nothing more but your motivation.  
Or I can be Nola, and you can be my Harry,  
Someone you can love but can never marry,  
Our love so pure yet needed to be hidden,  
For I don't understand why WE are forbidden.

We wait like hungry puppies for Wednesday,  
To talk over a box of pad Thai until the sky turn grey,  
We wait like starving lions for the weekend,  
To dress up for our dinner dates, wishing time would extend.

People see forever and infinity in their lovers,  
I see something else—I see flowers.  
The peak of their blossom is always the best,  
But it will soon wilt and become a mess.

I know that I will soon wake up to emptiness,  
A weekend full of joy will soon be replaced by sadness.  
You will soon be reduced to nothing but a mere memory,  
Someone who used to keep me going, my source of energy.  
You'll be a living being but on a screen,  
A stain of memory I'd desperately want to clean.

Maybe I'll love you enough to let you go.  
To see you pursue your dreams and watch you grow.  
Maybe I will learn to capture every moment and details of our  
times being,  
And let new seeds of love grow in spring.

I will forever remember you,  
Even across the wide ocean blue,  
The kisses and flowers you gave,  
And the new ways you shown and paved,  
Maybe our paths will cross again,  
Until then let's not have our hearts chained.  
Let me be your beautiful memory,  
But for the time being, let me love you—  
with truth, fervor, and constancy.

**Libri & Verbis:** Untitled

Eriq Henri Madsen

**W**hen I can go out  
And I will  
I will go to the street  
And stand firm  
With resolute peace  
In the fury  
Of indignation  
That while I rested my personal needs  
Inside my home  
While taking care  
Of the neighbors view  
Through a window close  
That I could find  
No calm  
As the seas stirred  
With a tempest  
Familiar and foul  
Such is the nature of lies  
And shifted blame  
I would carry it all  
With me justly  
Until I could go out  
And I will  
To stand for  
And against  
Treatment ill fitted  
To myself and  
Neighbors near

**Libri & Verbis: 'Perhaps'**

**Anon.**

**P**erhaps I am silent because your words hurt me.

Perhaps it hurt because your wrote a line of appreciation,  
and 40 of what you don't like.

Perhaps I am silent because everything I do,  
even my silence, is now seen as a fault.

Perhaps I am silent because I know  
that if I was to say anything  
it would be "it's over baby, unsubscribe".

Perhaps I am silent because in my heart  
this is not what I feel.

Perhaps I am silent because I am waiting for  
two words: 'I'm sorry'.

Perhaps I am silent because I don't 'do drama'.

Perhaps I am silent because inside I have  
moved on.

No perhaps, for it would be true:  
without you by my side.

## **Libri & Verbis: 'Chosen Dates'**

Kristin Schuster

Late last year I married the love of my life in a Cambodian wedding. We were lucky enough that there were the beginnings of whispers about a virus in China but no international panic had set in. I had friends and family come from around the world to witness me settling down and getting married after twelve years spent around the world. I had no idea what was going on for most of it but I tried my best to just go with the flow and it was magical. Our wedding was spread over a Sunday and Monday as those were our auspicious dates chosen by my husband's family fortune teller. Just one of the many magical elements of our lives together.

### **Chosen Dates**

It was a mess, people coming and going, yelling and laughing.

My quiet moments were a crescendo of confusion

This was the moment I had always been waiting for

He was waiting for me, I for him.

I travelled the world never quite knowing what I was looking for until I saw that smile, felt that warmth and my life would never be the same.

How naïve I had been to believe I had ever been loved before.

I can see colours clearly now and had never even realized I was seeing in black and white.

Here I was with a man, happy to be with me, to spoil me, to take care of me, to love me.

We never had to hide our feelings, we could be honest and our love was pure

I tripped and fell, tumbling into this chasm of the unknown of, Love.

These moments of calm, broken by being pushed and prodded, bound into dresses from another time, another person, another life.

Outside those curtains was my future intertwining with my past.

Loved ones from far and wide coming to see what could make the wanderer, the nomad, the adventurer tie up her boots, settle down.

It shone so brightly, everyone could see.

This was the moment.

The music was deafening, the excitement palpable, the language lost on me.

We didn't understand but we felt it. We absorbed it. It transported us and we were royalty.

Eternally, not without misunderstandings, misgivings, not in perfection

but in tenderness

and love.

**Libri & Verbis: 'I Miss You'** (with apologies to the late Adrian Henri)

Martin Bradley

I miss you  
In Common Grounds  
Where  
the grounds  
Grind  
Commonly  
without  
you

I miss you  
In tuk tuks  
Where I no longer  
Fight  
For the  
legroom  
But shift my feet  
Anyway.

I miss you in the Gallery  
Where  
I argue with myself  
Saying righteously blue  
Is in fact green.  
When I know  
That it is really  
blue

I miss you  
In your Angelina Jolly  
Tomb Raider Wat Walking Boots,

Your  
Hair and T shirt  
Provocatively  
Damp  
In the Khmer  
Heat  
While  
You  
Remain  
So cool.

I miss you  
When  
The  
Bed  
Creaks,  
And it's just me  
Turning over,  
Lonely  
Under  
The duvet.

I miss you  
For there is  
No  
Sunshine  
Without you  
Only  
Daylight  
And a sad  
whistfulness  
In the  
Cambodian  
air.

**Libri & Verbis:** Going Home

Jess Blackledge

Clouds merge into one giant mush of grey  
Traffic a little too smooth-sailing for my liking

Familiar dulcet tones on the wireless  
In real time, for once  
We sit among the  
Teapots and trinkets  
The comfort of isolation  
Warming us  
Defrosting our rusty conversation  
easing us in.

We avert our eyes and scuff our shoes  
And put the kettle on in a crisis  
Milk and two sugars  
Always seems to work  
must be witchcraft.

Novelties of crispy roast potatoes  
Endless bookshelves  
hold the tacit secrets of generations

Rambling in the drizzle  
muddy woodlands and rainy beaches  
complaining as we go but  
There's nothing like it.

We're not special here  
But nor do we deserve to be.

**Libri & Verbis: Shaman**

Jose Antonio Pineda

He stands on the cliff above the promontory  
the hills above the sea, wolves stand  
watch mushrooms and funghi grow in the cemetery  
as cats copulate under trees, birds eggs hatch

His head is wreathed in fiery thunderbolts  
Shaman, progeny of rainclouds and sun  
one day your soul will pass on to stars  
that diamond the onyx night time skies

Drink of loves philter of divine funghi  
emerge shining one from subterranean  
cave onto winged chariot of the sun  
and fly above lands Mediterranean

You escaped prisons of bars and barbed wire  
free to wander the roads to heaven or hell  
you roam city streets searching for love  
you await the holy one, bringer of dawn

Serpentine hair adorns her leonine profile  
as she harvests funghi and mushrooms  
to trespass treasure troves of dreams  
and sail past the pyramids by the Nile

Shaman, your road is blue and near done  
half devil half angel you followed the sun  
down times dusty highway traveled far  
to worship the dawn of the morning star

**Libri & Verbis:** ‘Lost’ Bukowski Poem

The HOWL ‘archeological’ team has been digging hard, searching the literary sands for lost words. In September, after months of excavation, they uncovered a poem from a little known bookshop in Wat Bo. Investigations suggest that it is a ‘lost’ work from the keyboard of Charles Bukowski, which raises the question: perhaps Bukowski really did make it to Siem Reap after all?

It is re-printed here for the first time.

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I want to compose food for you,  
share with you wine and song.

To stare at you and know I will soon take you:  
undress you with my eyes,  
balance you on my tongue.

And feel your black lingerie balled in my hands,  
you beautiful in dog style, bent.

And I will consume you:  
front, back,  
mouth and hind,  
and honor you at the temple of low men.

And we will laugh and scream,  
pant and sweat,  
as we moisten the sheets  
and pound the walls.

And at the end you will laugh  
and then you will cry:

“Is that all you’ve got old man?”



... Extract

## **Libri & Verbis:** Down River

It is HOWL's pleasure to feature an extract from the forthcoming book by **H.A Franck**, a volume dedicated to the author's deep love of the Mekong region. In this excerpt he recounts a descent of the 'Dragon's Back' –an untamed rapid on the Nam Ha—a remote Mekong tributary in northern Laos.



“When it came the change was sudden, catching our kayak unaware, the previous calm of the river giving way to something untamed and claustrophobic. To our sides the valley was transformed into a canyon of steep-sided walls - prison-like and oppressive. Ahead we could see the Nam Ha had shape-changed into a maelstrom of whirlpools and converging water, boiling and pulsing, a cascading torrent: we were being swept into the vortex of the Dragon's Back.

Our craft was thrust into a yawning trench, with a cresting wave and an enormous boulder waiting to greet us. Hastily, working together, we plunged our blades into the foaming current, working frantically to save ourselves from the specter of water and rock.

Any notion of control disappeared now as we rocketed forward, our ability to use our paddles the only thing saving us from disaster. Ahead, a branch from a fallen tree reared up, Toey flicking it away with his paddle, the blade deflecting the limb from our faces.

On the opposite side I could see the impending danger of a solid slip of rock, and with a reflex action I followed Toey's example, plunging my blade to stave off collision, my muscles flexing as we skimmed past the wall. On we hurtled—lurching between rocks, water and fallen obstacles—straining, anxious, mini-seconds from disaster.

Dropping down a channel the kayak was captured by a whirlpool, which swung us around for a second or two, the river's feral flux threatening to wrap us, like damp cardboard, around a jutting boulder. Released by the swirling eddy we ricocheted off a rock wall and broached through a wave, an arc of spray dowsing our previously soaked clothes. Through my arms and hands I could feel the unkempt energy of the Nam Ha, the paddle trembling in my hands, while inside I wondered when catastrophe would finally overwhelm us. And then ahead, clear water—salvation—we were almost through.

But there was a sting in the tail, a final piece of river drama, a stretch of boulders and frothing water, with toppled trees blocking the exit points – a trap. Too late we were pushed into the foaming caldron, the bole of a fallen branch almost taking off our heads as we ducked underneath.

Next, ahead loomed a rock, solid stone with sharp edges, a boulder ordained to impale us in the tempest of surging water. But Toey was quicker, all his ability and experience coming together in a double movement of guile and grace. First, he shoved us away from the stone with a lunge of his paddle and then—in his follow through, with a deft twist of his blade—shot us through a gap in the maelstrom. We were out – saved!

We were soaked but in one piece, exhilarated and alive, a calm patch of water rippling around us. Stretching my neck heavenward I set free a howl of gratitude, while a light breeze—a valley zephyr—whispered across my face.

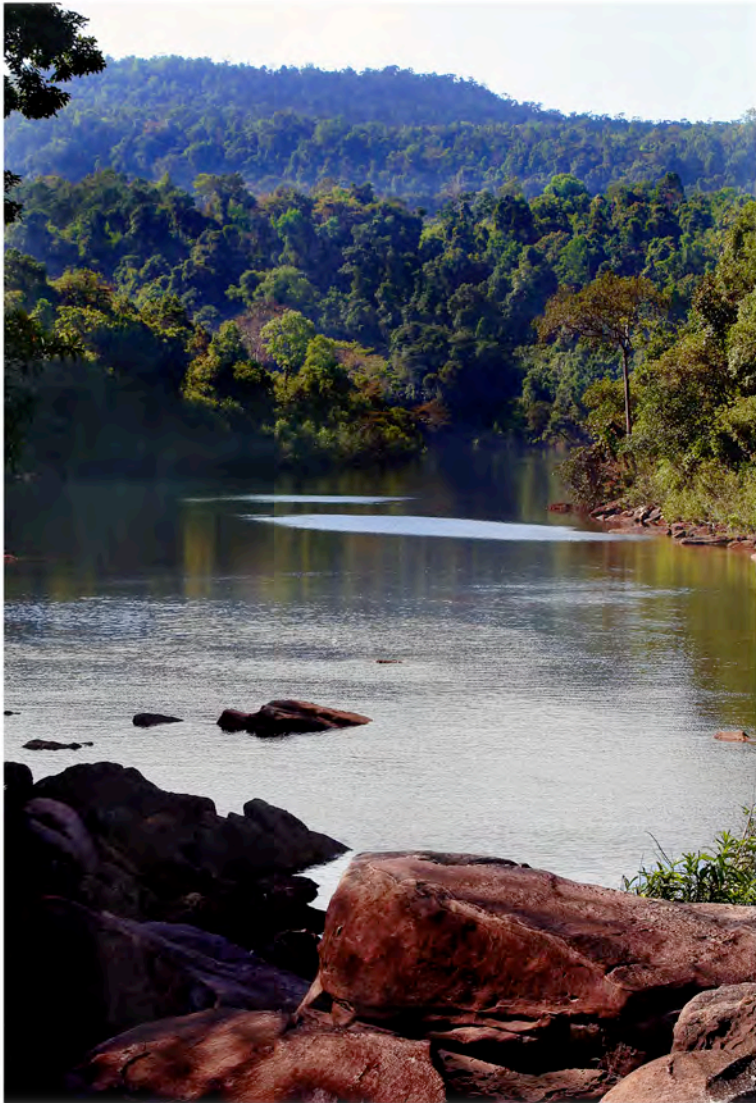
In the front of the kayak Toey was quiet; wondering, perhaps, how he had managed to save his river reputation back at the Luang Namtha office. Lost in thought he gently shifted his paddle through the current while staring into the water of the quiet pool

“That was harder than I expected”, he finally spoke. “I guess we should have walked it instead.”

There was no need to consider my reply:

“Yip, I think you’ll right.”

At this moment the only thing I could do was laugh—a survivor’s cry—our kayak at peace, the current drifting us around in an ever-arc-ing circle. Above the sun shone brightly, its rays drying our clothes, while Toey and I remained still, alone with our thoughts and visions of what might have been.



‘Face Masks & Hand Gels’  
is  
Brought to you by HOWL

A call out to the writers, readers, venues and all  
those who have cheered and supported our  
endeavours.

Special HOWL outs to:  
Little Red Fox, Village Café, Robert Starkweather  
(K4\_Media), Scott Bywater, Jessica and One  
Eleven Gallery, Bang Bang Bakery, Miss Wong,  
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A BIG THANK YOU  
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### **What is HOWL**

HOWL brings writers, audiences and spaces together to create one-off 'pop-up' word events. A HOWL happening might entail a book launch, a presentation by an author or publisher, a poetry or short-story jam, a workshop, a panel discussion etc., with the overriding theme being the primacy of the 'word'.

### **Our Inspiration . . .**

Our name is inspired by one of the great poems of the twentieth century, 'Howl' by Allen Ginsberg; a work whose words, verses and imagery threw open the possibilities for how we write, speak and publish. Our title is also inspired by the notion that it is the writer's role to 'howl wildly', to use words to fashion sentences, lines and verses that embolden minds, broaden imaginations and shine lights into the corners of human existence.

### **This Anthology**

This volume comprises prose and poetry gathered from the pen and keyboards of Cambodia and beyond over the course of the last twelve months. And while much of the writing here is inspired by our Covid times, it covers much more as you can read inside.

**Visit us at:** [howlcambodia.com](http://howlcambodia.com)



**HOWL**