

Savanna Webb

March 18, 2020

I don't know yet how to say
what it is I want
need
to say,
but something within me whispers,
Just write.

*The world is up in flames
and no one will judge
your swollen-tongued words.*

But just maybe
they'll bring some comfort
because they're proof
that *we were here.*

*

Yesterday, I walked out of my classroom
for what felt like the last time.
homework assignments left dormant on my boards,
posters asleep on the walls,
family pictures smiling from my desk
through the silence.
All already feeling like artifacts:
another abandoned Chernobyl ruin.

We all said our
goodbyes
and *good lucks*
safely from six feet away from one another,
hugless and with brave faces
and sometimes nervous, artificial laughter.

I can't help but regret
all of the purposely missed opportunities,
choices I made to socially distance myself
before I was mandated to.

*

Yesterday, I told my three-year-old son

to have the best day ever at school
because we were going to be on vacation for awhile—
“Spring Break”—
except we can’t go anywhere
because there are lots of germs floating around.

We count to twenty when we wash.
Mommy does the shopping alone.
Perkins is closed.
The playground is closed.
We stream educational videos on Youtube,
consider making our own
to pass the time.

*

I spend most of my time
scrolling through Facebook on my phone
and eating
and worrying.

*

There are always a few moments of innocence
right before I wake up

and then I remember.

March 21, 2020

I had just started tenth grade,
was sitting in French class
when my teacher stepped out of the room
and heard what had happened.

While she was gone,
my classmates and I took the opportunity to socialize
the way teenagers do.

Someone said they’d heard the Empire State Building
or some towers in Utica
got bombed
or something.

Or maybe there was a plane crash
somewhere.

I distinctly remember my friend Sam point to the windows
and shout, "Look out! It's a plane!"
And we all dissolved into laughs.

We had no smartphones,
no Chromebooks,
no way of knowing

what we would see on our televisions
when we finally got home
to our speechless and swollen-eyed mothers.

Now, I teach tenth grade.
Eighteen years ago, the towers fell
before I even knew they existed.
But my sophomores' worlds fell apart
bit by bit:
little raindrops falling around our arc,

no rainbows in sight.

Just last week,
many were joking,
making fun of anyone who sneezed or coughed,
complaining that sports got canceled,
casually worried about Prom.

We all have smartphones,
Chromebooks,
but no way of knowing

what is to come.

When my students are older,
this will be their 9/11,
their JFK assassination
their Pearl Harbor.

Worlds once again defined
by *befores* and *afters*,

we move forward together
but alone.

March 22, 2020

I called both sets of grandparents yesterday
for the first time
in a long time.

With all four living and over eighty,
I am aware of how very blessed I am.

It was refreshing to talk to them
to *listen* to them
without multitasking
or rushing our conversation.

I have all the time in the world.

Today, my grandmother remarked to my mom
how nice it was to hear from me,
that phone conversations with the people you care about
used to be the norm.

It's tragic that it took a pandemic
to push out all of the things that made me feel important
and make room for what really *is*.

March 25, 2020

I feel good.
Like, *damn good*.

My body feels healthy
and strong
(thanks to all these kids' workout videos).

Sometimes, I sit here,
focusing on my breathing
in
and out,
searching my body for any sign
of the virus.

When my hands come back empty,
I breathe
in
and out

again,
knowing
fearing
the virus' dormancy—
feeling its phantom legs
graze my skin,
leaving goosebumps in its wake.

Two weeks from now
or two days from now
or whenever the virus finds me,
(as it seems almost certain it will,)

I just don't want to look back
and wish I hadn't taken this feeling for granted.

I don't want to take this precious time for granted.

*

The new normal:

Abandoned schools, playgrounds
Empty toilet paper shelves
Limits on cereal, produce, meat
People wearing masks in supermarkets, cars
E-meetings
E-book readings
E-museum visits
E-visits
Virtual has become our reality
Constant social media noise
Endless real-life silence

March 26, 2020

You will not remember this.

It will be a story you hear about often,
so you will accept it as true.

If you try hard,
you just might remember the longest Spring Break ever,
Daddy working out of the basement,
washing your hands for twenty seconds,
or Mama going on about the germs everywhere,

yelling to Grace across our yards,
but never getting too close.

I am so grateful for your innocence
and more so for your ignorance.
Your laughter and joy have not been stolen;
you are unaware of the last time we have left the confines of this house.

You aren't worried or anxious.
You discuss your classmates and teachers
in the present tense.

You haven't asked when we are going back.

One day, my baby,
I'll tell you all about it,
but for now,
I'll bask in the glow
of your beautiful little world.

On the Eve of Pre-K During a Pandemic

The first golden leaves have started to fall,
leaving their mothers behind
who were never any match
for the mighty wind.

This summer, you have grown to half my height.
Still, I hold you tight, your legs dangling,
breathe you in one last time

before this next season
carries you away
into the unknown.

January 10, 2021

I'm standing at the edge of something big.

Soon, the virus-who-must-not-be-named
will course through my veins
dethroned at long last,
screaming like a banished dementor
while my body casts secret spells
to steel against future attacks.

I am one of the lucky ones.
Despite marching into battle several times,
I have yet emerged unscathed.
(*Victorious* seems an arrogant word to label
chance.)

I have thrown my pebble at Goliath
and have discovered that I am David,
though I don't feel very brave at all.

Instead, I am scared.

I'm scared that I don't know what normal means anymore,
scared that the fraying wires of my brain have short circuited,
perhaps for good.

Scared of what I've lost
scared of what happens next
who I've become
and mostly scared that I didn't become
who I was supposed to become,
that I didn't learn the lessons
I was supposed to learn:
squandered the precious time I was given
worrying, eating, scrolling.

Martin Luther King, Jr. sat in a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama
for a couple of days
and composed a letter that would change the world.

I have sat in my house
for one year
composing tweets, clicking *like*.

I mean, even *Prufrock* would have eaten the peach by now.
Oh, what a shame it would be to have thrown this all away.

I'm standing at the edge of something big.

Or maybe
I'm just starting to climb out of the abyss.