

The Inaugural Issue

Toastee Mag



Raising a toast to people who
made this pandemic their b*tch!



Magazine cover art by Urté Gluoksnyté.

Urté is an artist based in Lithuania. Her work consists of digital art, photography, paintings, and sketch. You can find more of her pieces on pages 36-39.

You can find her portfolio and contact her for commissions at gluoksnyteu.wixsite.com/artist. Follow her work on [@urte_gj](#) on Instagram and [urtegl](#) on Behance.

We made

this pandemic

our B*TCH!

Toastee Magazine | The Inagural Issue

Issue 1, December 2020

Letter from the Editors



2020. What a year!

We started with high hopes, ambitious travel plans, and felt like there was the potential for nearly anything and everything! Our plans were normal, the world had the Olympics coming, bull markets were predicted, and we, like everyone else, had exciting plans for the year ahead.

Then, this thing called the 2019 Novel Coronavirus hit the world. For most of us, the worst part was having to stay at home, cancel plans, be bored, and talk to our loved ones through computer screens. Some of us bored at home decided to take these pandemic lemons and make some freaking limoncello!

That's where Toastee Mag came in. We wanted to create a magazine to celebrate in our own way the people who made the best of this pandemic. We wanted to raise a warm, cozy, and delicious toast to some awesome people who are working in their own way to leave this world a more beautiful, fulfilled, equal, healthy, and delicious place. They are doing this through art, food, and through open conversations.

So, we raise a toast to all of our writers, interviewees, artists, and contributors! You rock! This magazine could not have been possible without you!

We also know that this pandemic hasn't been easy. Unfortunately, for many of us, the pandemic left us with a loss of income, a loss of stability, and even worse the loss of a loved one. Not all of us are privileged with a safety net or the time to flourish during this time at home. Today, we wish to dedicate this magazine to those busy on the front lines, the first responders, the retail workers stocking shelves, the hidden service providers, community volunteers, and to those struggling to even stay afloat.

We know that some may be in a position to help and may be looking for organizations or people to support. Look local, but also, in this magazine, some of our contributors have suggested amazing people and organizations to get in touch with. We are featuring fantastic organizations working to better our communities, our industries, and ourselves during this time. From saving the arts to helping local community members, they all could use a helping hand, and we raise a toast to them.

Dive into our inaugural edition of Toastee Mag. We raise a glass to amazing people who are shaking things up, making the world more beautiful, opening our minds, and creating connections. From creating new enterprises to creating new pieces, from helping others find their purpose to helping our communities, whether you're thriving or surviving, we all made this pandemic our b*tch!

Cheers and Happy Reading!

Elizabeth Harris
Editor-in-Chief

Emer O'Shea
Managing Editor

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**Because some of us took lemons
and made some freaking
awesome limoncello! ☐**



Stuck at home, we cooked, we listened to music, we binged TV shows, and we created. We sought beauty, flavours, and fantasy worlds to escape our lockdown confines. Here is a toast to the artist and creators that made staying in a more beautiful and tasty experience.

Some people like the world how Bond like his martinis, shaken not stirred! We raise a toast to those who decided to shake up the world during the pandemic. We raise a toast to those who decided to create their own opportunities during an economic downturn. We raise a toast to those who are working to make this a better place.



**Because the world
should be shaken, not stirred. ☐**

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

An interview with Jim Keane
by Emer O' Shea

The first time I met Jim, within moments we had bonded over our love of amateur drama. A writer, director, radio host, and true gentleman, Jim speaks on the value of live theatre, notably in smaller or rural communities in Ireland.

When brainstorming content for Toastee, we wanted to give Theatre and the Arts space in 2020. Space where they have had none. Theatre can range from large, award-winning Broadway productions, to local school productions on hand-painted backgrounds, or Nobel calls from a Dublin Stage calling out about prejudice and homophobia being amplified to a global audience.

Whatever the stage, Jim's passion and enthusiasm only heighten my excitement for his next production!

Jim, firstly, thank you for doing this. Reflecting on 2020 to date....How has your year been?

What a difference COVID-19 has made to all our lives and in particular to the entertainment and live performance sector, to say that I miss the buzz of the amateur dramatic world is an understatement. My perception of the value of live theatre, in particular in small rural communities has changed, only in the fact that it has reinforced my belief of the value of live theatre and all that belongs to it.

The closing of Theatre an all performing Art centres due to COVID-19 in 2020 has served to highlight the important role that Drama both Amateur and professional play in the mental and physical health and general happiness of people who are involved in the amateur drama world, both on and off the stage, and also the audience that attend and support it. The old saying "you never miss the water until the Well runs dry" rings so very true.

Amateur drama is as important to those involved in it as a sport is to those in the sporting world. There's a variety of people and talents required to put any performance on stage whether that is a play, a pantomime, or a musical, we need actors, producers, directors, stage crew, wardrobe and makeup crews, lighting and sound technicians, people for the front of the house, ticket sellers, tea and refreshment, set designers and construction, promotions and advertising and of course an audience. In fact, amateur drama could in fact be considered a small business because of the revenue and spend it generates in the local economy.



The set layout from Jim's play "A Living Will."

What plans to return to the stage on pause, have you used 2020 to write more? If so, where have you found inspiration?

Well, certainly 2020 has been a challenging year for anyone involved in the arts in any form, most amateur drama groups wrote off the year and decided that would reconvene when it becomes safe to do so. We picked the play, Big Maggie, by John B Keane in August of 2020, have the cast, but unfortunately, we had to postpone rehearsals, thus pushing the performance date until next year.

During the first lockdown from March to June, I used the time to write my second play entitled "Big Splash Small Fish" which I had hoped to stage in March of 2021 but so far Covid 19 has prevented me from proceeding with auditions. It will be some months before I might get this production in front of an audience, but as my Father would say if you were panicking about getting something done "there's no hour gone out of tomorrow yet".

Can you remember the first live theatre performance you saw?

I must acknowledge my Father as the person who introduced me to amateur drama in the first place. Back in 1970s, he was involved in the production of "Sive" by John B. Keane, a raw, blunt storyline of the abuse of a young woman by her family in rural Kerry. They were short someone to play the part of The matchmaker, my Father coaxed me to take on the role, the bug bit, and as they say, the rest is history.

Your favourite live performance?

I have always had a love for live performance be it a play a musical, a pantomime, or a concert, indeed any kind of a live show. One of my earliest memories of a live performance was a night in Brú Boru a beautiful theatre in Cashel, Co.Tipperary, where the great Seanacháí Eamon Kelly (a traditional Irish Storyteller, Kelly described Seanacháí as the oldest one-man show on earth!) was on stage telling stories as only he could, for two hours he held the audience spellbound with stories from Ireland of old, with no microphone, no props just himself his hat and one Súgán chair (a straw chair), it was a most memorable and enjoyable night and will rank as one of my favourites.

Of course, another memorable night was the opening night of my first play "A Living Will" in the Community hall in Knockavilla in Co Tipperary, a small intimate venue with a seating capacity of 140 people. After many months of rewriting, rehearsal, blood, sweat, and tears, the night arrived. The hall was packed to capacity, the cast ready to go, soundcheck, stage crew in place, ten minutes to curtain when the power went. We plunged into darkness. Panic would be a mild word for what I felt. An old fuse had blown, replaced and the show went on and only five minutes late. After that near disaster, the play ran smoothly for the three nights to packed houses and standing ovations, continued on for eleven performances to packed houses over four venues. Dare I hope for a similar success with Big Splash Small Fish!!

I had the pleasure of seeing your Play "A Living Will" at the start of 2020, my last opportunity to see live theatre! Do you have any suggestions to our readers who may have never ventured into a theatre before?

It is hard to convey the enthusiasm I have for amateur drama in the written word, but I can say that if you have any inclination of dipping your toe in the dramatic world you will not be disappointed or sorry that you took the Plunge. There's a place for everyone in our world from acting, small roles big roles, silent roles whatever to backstage, prompting, set design and construction, costume and makeup, sound effects, lighting, tea making or just general support. Find a drama society near you and call in and visit them, you will find that they are really nice people, a little whacky perhaps, but always fun to be with.



The poster from Jim's play "A Living Will" at Brú Ború in Cashel, Co. Tipperary.

Interested in more?

Playwright, theatre and amateur drama lover Jim Keane is a contributor and presenter on Tipperary Mid West Community Radio. Check out an interview with him on [Tipp FM Podcasts](#)

If you want to learn more about Eamon Kelly, check out [RTÉ Radio's Doc on One 'Man Behind the Stories'](#)

More than entertainment, Theatres provide a stage to voice change. [Panti's Bliss Noble Call at the Abbey Theatre in 2014 on YouTube](#)

Design & Sensibilities

An interview with Interior Decorator and Artist,
Shana Weisberg by Elizabeth Harris



Interior design rendering of a Parisian apartment reading nook by Shana, 2020.



From
globetrotting
consultant to
Parisienne
Interior
Decorator and
Artist.

Taking inspiration from gardens, Shana creates watercolor flower prints for her niece.

Shana Weisberg is an Interior Decorator and Artist whose account, [studio SENSIBILITÉ](#), is a visual ode to the sensibilities that influence and touch her life, designs, and art: America, Vietnam, and France. I talked with Shana on how studio SENSIBILITÉ went from an escape from the confines of a 30 square meter apartment during lockdown to a budding design business.

What inspired you to move from tech to interior decoration? And why did you decide to get your masters in interior design in French?

I have strong roots in the US, Vietnam, and France. My mother is Vietnamese, my father is American, my husband is French and his mother's side of the family also has Vietnamese origins. It's within and between these three distinct cultures that my inspirations reside. To articulate my creative expressions, I combine my cultural histories, innovations, and crafts through the lens of interior design. I am constantly searching for intersecting sensibilities and connecting artistries in my life and by extension through my work in interiors.

I arrived in Paris in 2019, without knowing French! I had worked as a technology and management

consultant for 7 years before coming to Paris. I originally started working in tech in Paris. By being in Paris, I was immersing my daily life in art, architecture, history, and language in a way I hadn't since I was a child. It exposed pieces of my personality and sparked childhood memories that I had long forgotten.

I quit my job and took a pause for a few months, career-wise. I decided to reconnect to the things that I loved as a kid again, such as ice skating, drawing, painting, and learning. After a few months, I was comfortable with basic French and connected the dots in my life. I had a clear path to becoming an interior designer. I quickly created a portfolio of artwork and designs I was working on, and Google translated what I wanted to say for an hour entrance interview to LISAA Mode (L'Institut Supérieur des Arts Appliqués, a fashion school in the center of Paris).



Image Left: Behind the scenes of the artist work in her studio space.



Image Right: The jardin d'hiver at the Musée Christian Dior in Granville, France. A place of inspiration for Shana.



An interior design rendering of a Parisian apartment dining room by Shana, 2020.

I got in, and it was the best decision! I have a renewed appreciation for the arts, history, and of course, can speak French now as all of my coursework was in French.

What was it like for you when the pandemic first hit and put Paris into lockdown? How did you not go stir crazy in a 30 square meter apartment?!

As soon as news of the lockdown started, it was admittedly difficult as the majority of my friends and family live in the US. I was experiencing a lockdown that many of those that I know experienced partially or not at all depending on where they lived. The only places open in Paris were grocery stores, pharmacies, and hospitals. In addition, we had restrictions on traveling over 0.5 miles from where we lived and needed signed certificates to leave our homes... not quite the Paris with overflowing cafes and bistros that you might normally imagine!

To keep sane, I took a hard look at our apartment and thought about how we would be using the space and how we could optimize every last inch! I ordered some multi-functional pieces of furniture and

started a process of having only things that we absolutely love in our apartment. I can proudly say we use every single item in our place! 30 square meters (about 350 sq ft) seems tiny to Americans, but it's the norm in Parisian apartments for young couples.

I know you started getting into watercolor paints again during the pandemic and painting. Amazing pictures btw! What inspired you to start studio SENSIBILITÉ? What was your initial goal and purpose for the account?

I started studio SENSIBILITÉ because I wanted to create a place where I could post my inspirations, artworks, and interior designs. I was beginning to get a lot of messages on my personal Instagram account whenever I posted my art and designs so I wanted a separate place to house all of these pieces.

How has studio SENSIBILITÉ helped you through the pandemic and through your design course?

In such challenging and unpredictable circumstances this year, I have found my work with

studio SENSIBILITÉ to be a grounding source in my life. Without physically seeing my family or many friends, or traveling, or being able to spend as much time outdoors this year, I've used the studio as a way to express myself and connect with nature.

What are you proud to have achieved so far with studio SENSIBILITÉ and your design and artwork?

I'm really proud of the fact that I had paying clients within a few weeks of setting up the studio! I have a few clients in the US currently where I am doing interior decoration coaching and consulting, which involves guidance on furniture, color, material, and light selection as well as tips on bringing it all together in your space. I love helping clients translate their ideas into reality.

What are you planning to do next? And after COVID?

I'm planning to continue doing interior decoration coaching and consulting. I love this side of the business that's starting! My goal for early 2021 is to begin licensing my artwork so that it can be used for products like wallpaper, stationery, and home textiles.

Is there a charity or organization that you want to give a shout out to?

There are two organizations that come to mind – the first is Madame de la Maison, where I am currently interning full-time. Madame de la Maison is a Paris

based rental company and online boutique for antique loving entertainers who like to keep things unique, stylish, and sustainable. Madame de la Maison wants to help people gather beautifully and experience joy in their everyday life with tabletop items scoured from the French flea markets. I learned so much and am truly inspired working every day with Ajiri Aki, the founder of Madame de la Maison.

The second organization is Little Africa, a cultural agency that helps individuals, associations, and businesses to connect with the best of African culture in Paris. I'm constantly looking to Little Africa for inspiration and have discovered some of my favorite restaurants, boutiques, and galleries in Paris because of them!

Follow Shana's designs and art [@studiosensibilite](https://www.instagram.com/studiosensibilite) on Instagram. She is also does decor consultations and art commissions. Contact her via Instagram.



Image Left: Shana Weisberg, Interior Decorator, Artist, and founder of studio SENSIBILITÉ.
Image Right: An interior design rendering of a Parisian apartment family room by Shana, 2020.

Coming "Awake"



An interview with Singer-Songwriter,
Von Banke by Elizabeth Harris

If The Fray and Tim Burton had a jazzy love child, then you would get Von Banke.

A German- American singer based in Dublin, Ireland, Von Banke (Yasmin Kurth) has been working tirelessly on perfecting her debut album, "Awake." So when lockdown restrictions were introduced halting music video production, what does an artist got to do? Keep making music!

I spoke with Von Banke on music, creating an album, and when uncontrollable factors interfere, what does this organized German do?!

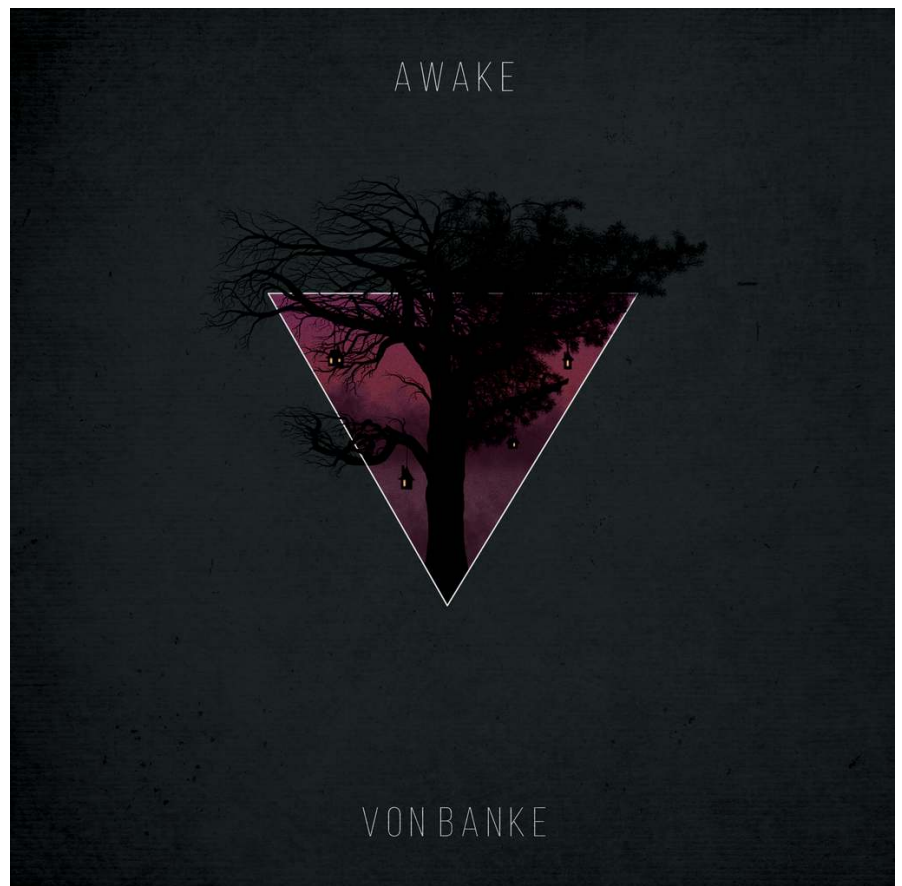
So Von Banke, congrats on completing your first full-length album "Awake"! An amazing accomplishment. You describe your musical style as the love child of The Fray and Tim Burton. Where did this interesting musical and style combo come from?

My parents always told me to "think 'further outside the box' than just Outside". Having creative and musical parents, I was lucky enough to be exposed to many different genres from an early age. (Although listening to Genesis' 23-minute 'Super's Ready' or rehearsing Operatic songs when all I wanted as a teenager was to sing Rock was appreciated far later on in life... Sorry, Mom and Dad).

Today when I write music, I try to combine what I love from all these fascinating genres the world has given us. The complexity of Progressive metal, the orchestration and arrangements of compositions, the honesty of Lyrical Singer-Songwriters, the feel and mood of rock, etc.

The more you are willing to learn, the more you find your own way of doing things.

I remember you telling me about all the challenges, the ups and downs, of making this album. How has your journey to "Awake" been?



Journey is probably the best way to put it! Everything that could've gone wrong with this album, did. I had a studio, I lost the studio, musicians had scheduling conflicts, engineers couldn't take part that had committed before, the list goes on! "Awake" is supposed to be a 'coming of age' album about finding yourself and your strength, and I certainly feel like I did that during this process.

After a while, people were starting to say "Jeez, you're quite resilient," but at one point, resilience was the only option. I ended up not only writing and doing the vocals for the album, but I also recorded the guitars as well as did a good chunk of the mixing for it.

So much time, energy, and just plain work had gone into "Awake" (from not only me but the other people involved) that there was no way I could give up. I think that's why I'm extra proud of this album. Because it doesn't just prove that I have a voice, but that I'm willing to stand up for it.

I know that this past year you were planning on creating a series of music videos to go along with the album. How have you been able to adapt to changes from the pandemic lockdown?

The music videos have sadly been put on hold for right now. Lockdown has made it easy to fall into a bit of limbo, so I've been trying to commit to a routine where I've been able to start writing again.

Doing something creative is a bit of a balancing act between committing enough time to get your projects completed, but also to go out and have experiences so you actually have something to say.

I've been so caught up with finishing "Awake," that I haven't had the time to sit down and process that whole experience. Lockdown has been a great way to do that.

With so much of the arts from live concerts to theatres and festivals shut down, how have you adapted as an artist? How have you seen other musicians and artists adapt?

As unfortunate as this pandemic has been for all of us, on so many different levels it's happened at a rather fortunate time. Technology is such a great tool nowadays for creating. People have been performing shows on Instagram and taking online courses to learn to record at home. So much more is possible today



than it would've been a few years ago. I also think it's a really important lesson that life pretty much forces you to learn to be adaptable.

Something doesn't work? Find a new way to do it. I have friends who make their living gigging and busking, and it's so devastating that they've been out of work so this long, but they're all still creating.

Some are doing online courses to broaden their musical chops. Some are composing for directors around the world. Others are isolating with fellow musicians and writing new music. Things are always possible if you care enough to do it.

So, be adaptable! You can be stubborn when you're old.

So what is next for you and music? What's next for "Awake" and after?

I'm in contact with a few film projects to incorporate some songs from "Awake" and also compose new songs as well as compositions. I'm also currently working with Panorâmica Boreal Films on a 3-part Youtube Series from Writer/Director Jay Laurentino, which I'm very excited about. The two of us

have worked on several projects throughout the years.

Other than that, something this year has taught me to not plan too far ahead! Continue writing new music, working with other creatives, and just keep moving. That's always going to be "What's next."

Are there any organizations you would like to give a shout out to?

MiraCosta College in San Diego is where I received the bulk of my education. I'm eternally grateful for whoever graced that school's Music Department. Even the universities I attended didn't live up to the support and possibilities that college gave me.

I'd love to give a massive Thank You to the people that worked on "Awake". Markus Kmitta and David Hamilton (My Heroes), Glenn Hughes, Kristina Kalchev, Jack Rufus-Kelly, Phil Noone, and Adam Mcnamara.

You can listen to "Awake" and other songs by Von Banke on her website www.vonbanke.com. Keep up to date with her music [@VonBanke](https://www.facebook.com/VonBanke) on Facebook and [@Von_Banke](https://www.instagram.com/Von_Banke) on Instagram. Her album drops on Spotify on December 12th.



Sing String. A jazz duo featuring Von Banke (right) and Jimmy Brennan photographed by Laura Forde.



Finding Art & Life in Waste

By Hilary Kwan

This is a story about art, community, and daring to be myself.

I grew up in Hong Kong, a metropolis whose culture values stability and pragmatism. When I moved alone to the San Francisco Bay Area for college and work, I continued to embody those values. I believed in the false dilemma of choosing between a professional career and passion. I chose to lay my passion aside and focus on my career. A decade later, I kept pondering whether I should take a sabbatical to travel and align my life with my values. It dawned on me that time is finite and there is no better time to go than the present. Having no idea that COVID-19 would happen, I started the trip with my partner in December 2019.

Like my trip, my art journey was curvy and unique. My mom is an Art teacher, and I have a lot of friends that were into design, manga, and animation. Under their influence, I always enjoyed drawing as a hobby growing up. Even though I had considered going to art school, I was deterred by the cost and burden it would place on my family. Gradually, I even stopped engaging in art creations during college and work, drowning out my heart with excuses of being busy with work.

During sabbatical and COVID times, I really wanted to use the extra time to reconnect with art and level-up my art skills. That led me to take a series of fundamental classes from Skillshare. For 1-2 hours everyday, I watched tutorial videos and practice sketching basic shapes, volume, shading, perspective, gestures. The classes ended in 3 months, but I continued to draw consistently after that.

Drawing has changed my life. Drawing brings out the best part of me - the part where I am persistent and concentrated. Drawing helps me to get into a flow state, as if time itself seems to stand still on the tip of my pencil. Having the support of my partner, my family, and my friends fuel my learning progress, and I am grateful that they are in my life.

Finding one's tribe and community can spark magic. My magic struck in a hidden valley surrounded by mountains 3 hours away from the nearest big city in Northern Thailand. I made friends with Eleanor from Borneo: a fearless soul, artist, tattooist, activist. These labels barely scratch the surface of describing her - her full portrayal requires much more color.



Picture of Hilary Kwan, illustrator and graphic designer.

From our first encounter, Eleanor and I connected over art and the history of colonialism. Eleanor has consistently used art to bring people together. She brought up the idea of creating a space for artists and creativity, and possibly creating an exhibition. She asked if I was interested. Having no prior experience in exhibiting, I had some doubts, however, I recognized the magic of jumping on such a unique opportunity.

Starting something new is not easy, but everything you learn is yours to keep. I had a few ideas already from the past year to get me started with the exhibition. I picked the topic of waste and sustainability because it is so easily disposable and forgotten. I wanted to explore the impact humans have on our environment, especially with our existing corporations, systems and habits. It is not a pretty subject, and it triggers negative emotions. Still, I wanted to bring a spotlight on it, even if I could only do so for a night or a month.

The question I had in mind: how can humans live more sustainably with nature so that future generations can enjoy it as well?

For my medium and materials, I tried to reuse as much material as I could. These included a nylon bag, cardboard, and trash collected on the street. If my art piece is like the main street of the exhibition, I realized that there were many small unknown alleys that were equally important. These include how to run an exhibition, how to prepare the space, how to hang my work, and how to conduct event marketing etc. Luckily, I had plenty of support from Eleanor, my mom, my partner, and the community. Friends came to share their meals with me, shared their paint for repainting the wall, provided ideas and helped with the pieces. On opening night, two friends, Jukki and Uma performed butoh dance, while Eleanor played traditional Borneo music with her flute from home. Seeing how the community came together gave me a lot of hope. What I learned is that people create, people collaborate, people unite, and people initiate changes.

The exhibition turned into so much more, and now the memories and lessons are mine to keep. After this experience, I am more confident to create something new and collaborate with others. Even as a beginner at something, I don't have to start from scratch. There are previous skills and experiences that I can apply to new challenges. I am constantly reminded of this when I create a new piece of art.

Hilary Kwan is an illustrator and graphic designer. Her art includes paintings, multi-material pieces, and graphic designs.

You can follow her travels and art [@ifuckinglovedrawing](https://www.instagram.com/ifuckinglovedrawing) on Instagram. You can contact Hilary on Instagram for commissions.

Check out her artwork on pages 32-34.



From left to right: Jukki, Uma, Hilary, Eleanor, and Luna at the art exhibition in Thailand.

Cooking Through My Pandemic

by Sam McArdle

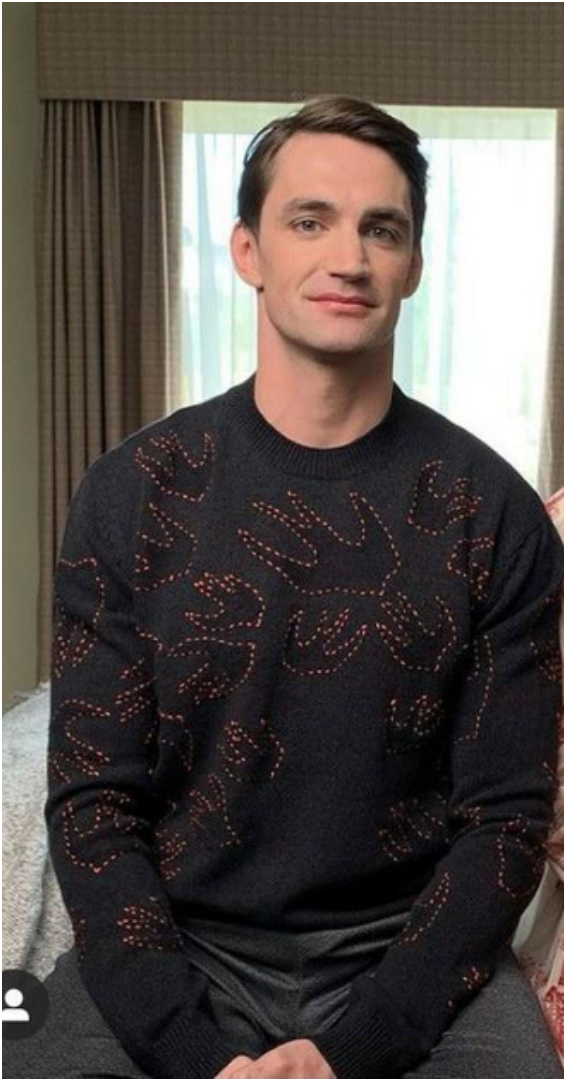


The
year 2018 was
my pandemic.
I was in a
mental
lockdown.

Basically, I was on social welfare for almost 2 years. I was fired from a job the Christmas before; I quit acting; I couldn't get a job; I couldn't get a break. 2 years previously to this, I was doing theatre in New York with Cate Blanchett and Daniel Craig coming to see our company, Cheek By Jowl. And now, here I was without a job. I was unemployed and feeling so overwhelmed. I wasn't in a good place.

I did an exercise from Tim Ferris, my favorite podcast host, where you take a review of your year. What have you done? What have you achieved? What have you learnt? And I realized that for all of 2018, I had been very negative, very angry, and very defeatist. I had lost track a little of who I was. And even worse, I had learnt nothing.

Then at Christmas of 2018, I was given a cooking book by "The Happy Pear" twins. I heard of them before and enjoyed their light-hearted take on life. One day, I made one of their recipes, a chickpea curry, and I put it on Instagram. Some people commented, "Ah, that's



Sam was featured in Brown Thomas' [Belong Together](#) ad.

cool. Fair play." I realized that I had spent so much time looking for jobs or just going to the gym on my own, that I had kind of gone into a little cave and wasn't seeing anyone. It seemed like everyone but me had their dream job or that their career was going well. Even though I'm a social person, and this is weird to say, I found that communicating with people via these videos would bolster me up for the week ahead.

Then I had to prepare a dish for a friend's dinner party, so I made this sweet potato and marshmallow dish. I put a bit more effort into that, and I did a voice-over, and I just joked about it. Two or three more positive comments and messages came in.

I started cooking a lot more, and I started putting more and more thought into it. I was someone growing up who loved being a performer. I used to be in a band when I was

younger, and I then became an actor. But I had lost my self-confidence, and so I stopped wanting to be in front of the camera. But with each weekly video, I started to claw it back, and then I started putting my face into the video more. Let's be honest, everyone knows what chopped onions and peppers look like.

After about 2 months, I started a routine of going to the gym 5-6 times a week and cooking. However, at the weekends, I would get very anxious about my life. I was still on welfare, still getting down to the last few rounds of jobs, but still no luck. I felt like I was wasting my life and wasting my time. My self-talk was so bad, so negative. Meditation wasn't helping, and the positive effects of a workout would wear off after a few hours.

However, whenever I would get stressed, I would just go and read up some cooking books. I would spend between two and five hours in the kitchen at any day just slowing down. I would think about what I was going to cook today. I realized that you have to take your time with cooking, and you have to be specific with the measuring of ingredients. It became my form of therapy and meditation, and it really calmed me down.

Cooking was my Apollo Creed to my Rocky. Cooking was my training partner that got me back on my feet, that got me thinking, "You should have a crack at writing this play you've been thinking about for a while, *The Manny*." From there, I started jumbling down ideas. Now, it's a dark comedy about a male nanny who works for affluent single mothers in west London. It also deals with themes of masculinity, loneliness, and dating in the 21st century digital age.

Writing my play was slow as f*ck because my self-confidence was so low.

When I started writing it, I said to myself, "Maybe you're not a writer, but can you give me just 10 minutes a day. Just give me 10 minutes every day of writing uninterrupted." So, I started with 10 minutes a day. Gradually, it turned into 15 minutes, 20 minutes, and eventually, I got the bare bones of a script by summer 2019. Then, I got a job at a consulting company.

I'd first heard of the role when I was invited along to an unemployed person's networking group (there really is no way to glam that sentence up is there?). Someone had dropped out of going at the last minute, allowing me a space to attend. The guest speaker was the head of one of the teams Claire Carroll. She gave an overview of the work she does, and the different personalities that work there. I've never heard of a workplace described like that was before.

Later on, that evening, I worked out what her email address was and sent her a cover letter and a CV. She said thank you and that she'll let me know if there are any vacancies. A few weeks later I'm in New York with some friends on a cultural pilgrimage to witness Wrestlemania 35, and I get a phone call from a recruiter to say I have an interview for a role on one of the team's in a week. A few days before it, I feel exhausted and burnt out from the prep. I decide to go easy on myself, take a break, and bake something. I decide on Chickpea Cookies, they go down well. A little too well. It says there are enough portions for 12 people. We'll see about that.

I ended up getting the job. Genuinely, my first bit of good fortune in two years. Just having that job and that routine, I realized that I was doing so much wrong in the last 2 years. I wasn't talking to anyone. I was just feeling sorry for myself. I wasn't focusing on the things I can do. I actually can write a play. I have half a script here. I actually am into cooking, and I'm actually okay at narrating it.

Over time, I started getting more into videos and writing the play. In January 2020, I said to my buddy Donal Gallery, "You show me something you're working on Valentine's day, and I'll show the first draft." By setting that target and holding myself accountable for it, I had to get it done. Then COVID happened.

Because I had those two years of hell and mental anxiety and mental burnout, I was able to get through it. I could get through this pandemic. So when COVID hit, I was f*ck that, what can I control? Ok, so the cooking keeps me on a routine, and this play I'm writing, this is the end goal I want to get to. So, I just needed to stay calm, keep to a routine, and focus on that.

Now I have two hours back in the day, I know that I am in a fortunate position with my job. I don't have to go to work and come home from work. So what am I going to do in those two hours that used to be travel time? Now is the time to spend on passion projects you always wanted to do. For me, it's the cooking videos and *The Manny*.

I let 2018, as a year, go by. I didn't learn to drive, I didn't write my play, I didn't get better at cooking, I didn't get a handle on my nutrition. I just sulked and wasted the year. I remember coming towards the end of 2019, I'll never let life go by without squeezing the

most out of it as I can. So when COVID hit, I just kept to the belief that "the routine will keep me sane."

All throughout 2020, I continued with my cooking videos, and I started doing drafts of *The Manny*. Now, it's finished. The play is ready. As someone who fell out of love with acting, the cooking videos helped me to get back into it, and now, I got a play.

Through COVID, I know what it's like to stay in bed and pull the covers over and block out the world. I did that for at least 9 months, and I never want to do that again. So when the pandemic hit, I thought to myself, "Right, what can I do to not fall back in that trap?" For me, it was creating a routine.

So what started for me as trying out a little curry recipe from *The Happy Pear* helped me to find my meditation and start a routine. The cooking helped me to rebuild my self-confidence and find my passion for performing. It helped me to start writing my play. It helped me to find a routine and work on the things that matter to me.

I can't control if I get to Hollywood. I may never get to play a Shakespeare role on stage. I might never get to be part of a really important story told on TV. But, I can control writing a play about a young man and what it talks about: objectification, mental health, relationships, dating in the digital age, and responsibility. I can control writing that and putting that on. I am going to put that on, and whatever comes after it comes after it.

- AS TOLD TO ELIZABETH HARRIS



A shot from Sam's Spicebag recipe video.

Sam McArdle is an actor, writer, and consultant. He produces cooking videos on Instagram [@smcardle5](https://www.instagram.com/smcardle5), where you can also get updates on his play *The Manny*.

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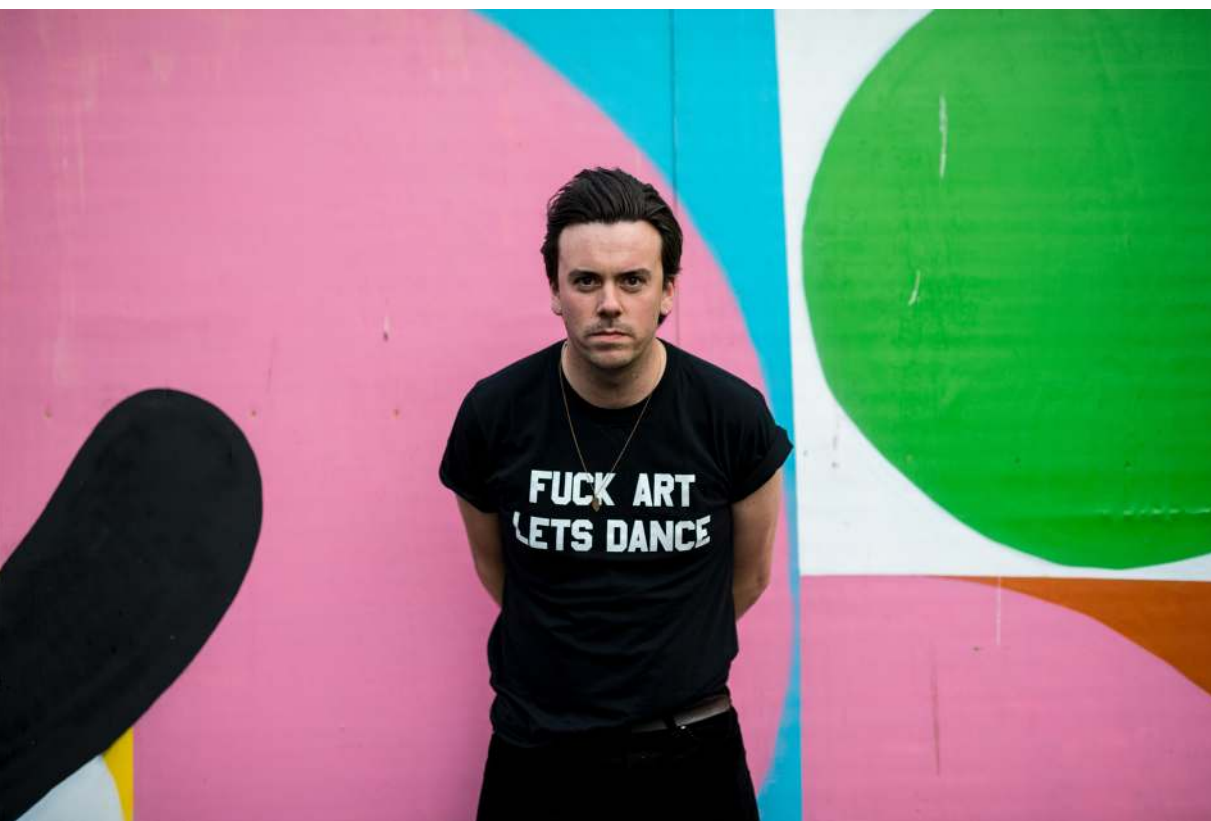
www.yourkalle.com

Why Theatre **MATTERS!**

(And what we must do to save it)

By Ross Gaynor

*For the purposes of this article, the word 'theatre' can be exchanged for any artform of your choosing, theatre is simply my artform of choice.



Ross Gaynor photographed by Jack Breslin.



I performed my first play in 2004 (excluding the obligatory mumbled Nativities of childhood). I was thirteen years old, and more or less had to be dragged by the ears. The show was Honk! (the Ugly Duckling Musical), I was in the chorus, I had no lines, and I missed the first week of rehearsals because I resisted attending for so long – yet, at that stage, it was the most thrilling experience of my short life. I made friends that I still have today, I sang, I danced (both for the first time), I performed in front of an audience of watchful eyes, and most importantly, I met girls! Which for a thirteen-year-old boy in an all-boys school, was a very educational experience! For all forthcoming plays and musicals, I most certainly did not have to be dragged by the ears to audition (nor was I first in line, because that wouldn't have been cool), but I did audition early and I did audition often. As the years went on, studying drama, then acting, and ultimately becoming a professional, my priorities really didn't change that much – I got to act, sing, dance, make lifelong friends, and again, (very importantly, but not most importantly anymore) meet girls.

As an educator, I teach young adults who struggle to make friends, struggle to develop romances, and deeply struggle to get up on stage and perform. These are all lessons I learned nearly twenty years ago, doing Honk! (The Ugly Duckling Musical), and believe me, they are easier to learn at thirteen than they are thirty. The concept of jumping in the deep end, feeling the fear and doing it anyway, saying yes, and ultimately, having a confident and assured sense of self – are all lessons learned from performing on stage (or in this first instance, being forced to perform on stage). There are many profound reasons for why people fall in love with the theatre – the politics of Brecht; the absurdity of Beckett; the oppression of Boal – but my reasons for loving it are much more human...

it allowed me to make friends, meet girls (have I said that before?), and learn how to stand and talk in front of hundreds of people, which meant standing and talking to any one person became a thousand times easier. In other words, it gave me the confidence and ease to navigate my way through this oftentimes cruel world and allowed me the opportunity to develop my sense of self through that. It is for these reasons, whose importance far exceed profundity, that I was determined that no plague, politics, or ignorance would ever allow the theatre to die, it simply has too much to give to too many – and lives, though not ruined, could never be as rich without.

My name is Ross Gaynor, and I am artistic director of The Lock Inn (thelockinn.io) – a live, online, and interactive events venue. The Lock Inn was conceived and eventually birthed through the aforementioned plague by James Stafford. James is an incredible events director, and I am proud to say, one of my best friends, though we are yet to meet face to face. For that is the year we are in, you can start a business, make a success of that business, and make a lifelong friend, all without ever being in the same room, town, or country together. Following on from its immaculate conception within the cerebral womb of James, the two of us together decided to raise The Lock Inn as our child, and make it the best venue in town, albeit there was no venue, and really, there was no town. The world is our oyster, the global audience our desire, and the restrictions on us are non-existent. I will briefly describe to you what we do, how we do it, and ultimately why.

In the list of 'What', we have programmed theatre – our first play, Glassmask's production of Mark O'Rowe's *Howie The Rookie*, which is undoubtedly the most truthful and faithful production of *Howie* since its premiere twenty years ago; *Reboot Live*, the first

theatre festival whereby every single play was streamed live and online. Reboot employed 50 theatre artists and premiered 18 new plays. Having both a socially-distanced physical audience of ten, and a much larger global audience online; **Blind**, an audio-horror experience, which was broadcast over Halloween, designed to be listened to through earphones, alone, and in the dark; **They Float Up**, a co-production with the legendary Bewley's Café Theatre, which is a restaging of their 2019 hit production. For this, we have restaged it in a unique and innovative way, which we are jokingly referring to as a site-specific restaging of a stage play on film; and some extremely exciting collaborations and developments to follow.

We have programmed comedy (**Jarlath Regan's An Irishman Abroad Online Comedy Club**); quizzes; music, including **Sofft Nights**, the largest music festival in Ireland in 2020 (100 socially distanced audience members attended); and we have completely reinvented charity fundraising to take place online, doing massive fundraisers for the **London Irish Centre** and **JW3**, raising £100,000 and £350,000 for them respectively. These events were innovative because the operating costs ended up being only 3% of the total raised, making it the best ratio of cost versus money raised that they ever achieved. This innovation allows more charities to fundraise more often, more cleverly, and at a much lower cost than what they are used to, ultimately ensuring more money raised for their cause.

The Lock Inn was born, like many things, from a meeting of minds. But also, an ambition to take Irish arts, always regarded as world class, to the world! With streaming online, rather than playing to one hundred people a night in Dublin, we have the opportunity to reach a global audience. Every drama course in the world teaches Beckett, O'Casey, Synge, McDonagh etc... every literature course teaches Joyce, Yeats, Heaney

and the rest. This is a market, as yet untapped, apart from irregular world tours, that we intend to conquer.

I could go into great detail about how we film and stream our content and what each individual's role is. But in reality, what we do is akin to alchemy. There is magic, there is trickery, and there is personality. It is these intangible factors that separate us from the rest and these are the reasons why no other streamed content has matched what we're doing.

Now, we get to the 'Why'. Aside from world domination or ambition, The Lock Inn was born out of being dismayed. Dismayed by the way my trade is considered in the public eye, dismayed by the way my trade is treated by the government, and dismayed by the way my trade is left at the whim of arts council funding to make it happen. So many incredible artists sit at home waiting for the telephone to ring. So many incredible artists' groundbreaking ideas will never be realized because a small group of people have deemed it not worthy of funding. My grandmother used to say "you can sit and moan about the dark, or you can light a penny candle." The Lock Inn is our penny candle, founded on two basic principles.

One, that something is always better than nothing. Two, Plato's classic adage "There are only two things you should not be angry about: what you can change, and what you cannot."

One can begrudge the leaders of our industry, or claim that the world is unfair, or one can stand up and lead by example themselves and light their penny candle – and that is what we are attempting to do. We shall not sit in the dark, and we shall change what we can. We will not go gently into that good night and furthermore, we fully believe that this is the future of the arts – a combination of both physical and online audiences. At the moment and for the foreseeable future, that physical audience will have to be limited,



Ross Gaynor photographed by Jack Breslin.

but, eventually there is no reason why you couldn't have a full house in person, and ten times that audience across the world tuning in. There is no reason this can't entirely change the way new audiences consume theatre, and art in general.

We all hate the phrase the "new normal", but for children, teenagers, and young adults, their concept of what theatre is now will be very different to what ours was growing up – and they are the future of theatre, so who is to say they will not continue to create theatre bearing online streams in mind, thus fundamentally changing the visual and personal experience of the theatre, and making it a new and ever-adapting artform. Personally, I prefer that concept to seeing the theatre wither away like a plant without sunlight. Art is too important to allow that to happen, and we must remember that, whilst also embodying the concept of Adapt or Die. As Shaw said, "You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use works of art to see your soul."

The freedom, confidence, and self we speak of can of course be achieved for many through sports, academia, family, career, and various other sources, all with louder and stronger lobbies than the arts. So, we will continue to do this, and continue to ensure the theatre does not die. Not so we can receive plaudits and trinkets. Not so we can achieve riches (trust me, that ain't gonna happen). Not so we can advance our careers, or gain any sort of industry clout. We will continue to do this, so that despite yon plague, or any interruption, theatre remains in our psyche and in our consciousness, even if we are considered the annoying buzzing fly who simply won't leave you alone, so that now and forevermore certain thirteen year olds for whom sports et al mean nothing, will continue to make friends for life; sing; dance; act; meet girls; and ultimately – learn how to simply be.

Ross Gaynor is an actor, writer, and educator. He is also the Artistic Director of The Lock Inn. Keep up to date with Ross [@ross_gaynor](#) on Twitter and [@rossgaynor](#) on Instagram.

Check out the Lock Inn at www.thelockinn.io for great events and shows streamed at home live. Follow the Lock Inn [@lockinnevents](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

6.26.4



ART

G

Some of us refined our art and some of us found a new passion.

A

Art and photography were ways to express ourselves and capture our world.

L

L

E

We raise a toast to those making us think and making our world a more beautiful place through their craft.

R

Y



Natalya Permyakova. "Normandy"
Watercolor on paper, 21 cm x 30 cm

Natalya Permyakova is a Russian-born multi-media artist. She pours her multi-cultural background, spirituality and strong, social views into her work. Natalya likes experimenting with her subjects and mediums and her work spans painting, photography, video and multi-media projects.

Follow her work [@natalya_permyakova_artist](https://www.instagram.com/natalya_permyakova_artist) on Instagram. Check out her website www.natalyapermyakova.com for her portfolio and to contact her for commissions and sales.



Hilary Kwan. "Turtle Rescue"
Acrylic on cardboard. 25 in x 34 in



Ocean animals interact with materials humans create. If they are not disposed of correctly, these materials end up in the ocean and can endanger the lives of dolphins, turtles, and other marine animals. It is estimated that there are 640,000 tonnes of fishing nets abandoned in our ocean, accounting for 10% of the total plastic waste in the sea.

Hilary Kwan grew up in Hong Kong and has lived in San Francisco since moving for her studies. A few years ago, she reconnected with art after discovering the storytelling and healing aspect of art.

In this exhibition, she explores the impact we have on our environment with our existing corporations, products, and habits. The question she asks is how humans can live more sustainably with nature so that future generations can enjoy it as well.

For medium, she reused material including nylon bags, cardboard, and trash collected on the street.

Check out more of Hilary's artwork and contact her for commissions [@ifuckinglovedrawing](https://www.instagram.com/ifuckinglovedrawing) on Instagram.



Vergil Tasev. "Masks: Use beyond protection"
Digital Illustration.

If we have to wear masks, then at least make it enjoyable. Take advantage rather than complain about them or protest even. We should look past the mask as just an uncomfortable necessity and find a usefulness in them, beyond even the health protection.

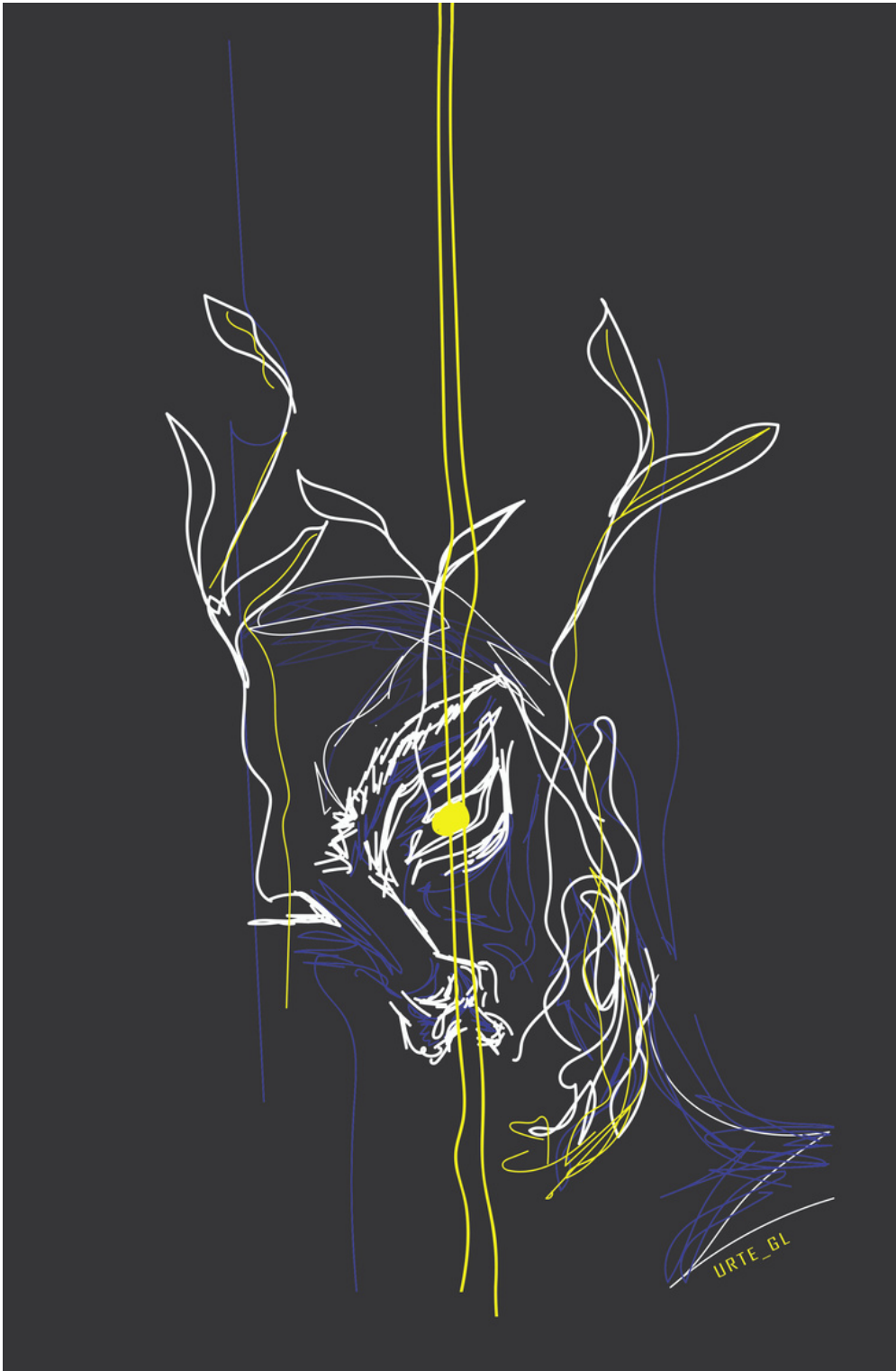
Vergil Tasev is a self-taught digital artist and designer, learning through drawing what I likes. And like any other artist, art has been his passion since he can remember.

Follow Vergil's work and contact for commission
[@vergil_art](#) on Instagram.

Urté Gluoksnyté. "Reborn"

Digital Illustration.

It's about the new start, feeling fresh and reborn. No matter what bad has happened, you can grow as a person from the damage.



Urté Gluoksnyté is a Lithuania-based artist. She started painting from a very young age, and it always was her way of expressing herself. Her portfolio consumes different types of media: photography, digital art, video and paintings, because she loves trying new things.

Check out Urté's portfolio gluoksnyteu.wixsite.com/artist. Follow her on Instagram [@urte_gl](https://www.instagram.com/urte_gl/) and on [Behance](https://www.behance.net/urtegl).

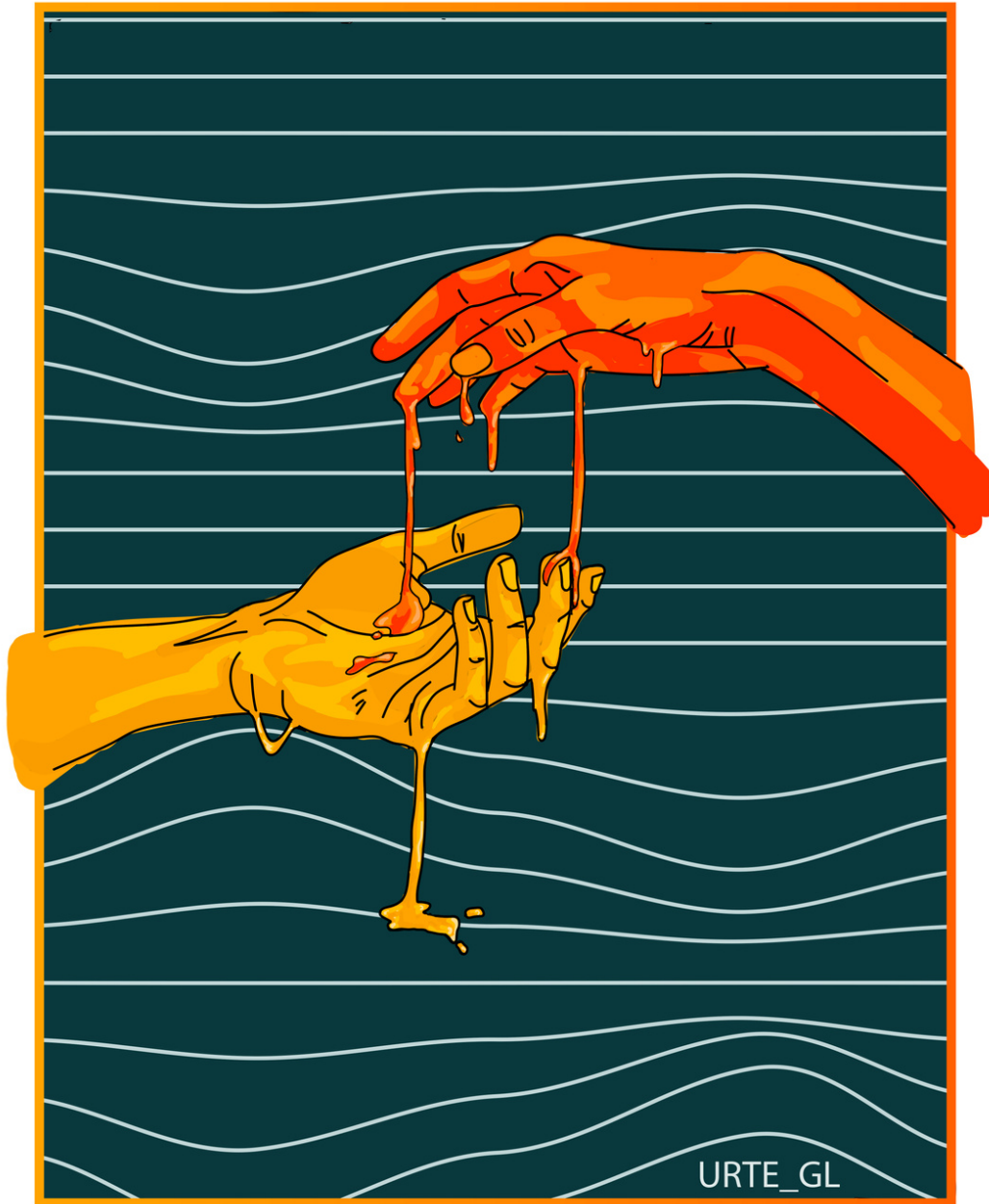


Urté Gluoksnyté. "Pandemic"

Digital Illustration.

This is about praying that the disease won't touch you and your family. The triangle (hands) symbolizes that the person feels like he is in prison. He can't move. Everywhere he looks there is news about COVID-19.

RELATIONSHIPS



Urté Gluoksnyté. "Relationships vs Breakups"
Digital Illustration.

BREAKUP



It is about human interaction. We give each other to one another, we make promises, but in the end, we can't even pick up the phone.



Christian James Tom. "In Vogue"

Canon 5d Mark III.

Model: Amy Eritsian ([@travengerpost](#)).

Christian James Tom is an LA-based photographer who works in finance and moonlights as a photographer. He is particularly passionate about museums, art history, fashion, and photography. He cites his inspiration as famous photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Annie Leibovitz, and Cecil Beaton.

Follow Christian's work and contact him for commissions [@chrisxcrossx](#) on Instagram.



Christian James Tom. "Bubblegum"
Canon 5d Mark III.
Model: Amy Eritsian (@travengerpost).



Christian James Tom. "Beauty in Darkness"
Canon 5d Mark III.



Christian James
Tom.
"Serene Tiger"
Canon 5d Mark III.



Jake James Dougal. "The Time of Her Life"
Sony a7RIII.

Jake James Dougal is a photographer whose craft is the only thing keeping him sane. He is looking forward to taking his camera around the world while teaching, although he is finding a deeper appreciation for home through his captures.

Follow Jake's work and contact him for commissions [@jakejamesdougal](https://www.instagram.com/jakejamesdougal) on Instagram.



Jake James Dougal. "Scale and the Sunset"
Sony a6300.



Jake James Dougal. "On High Alert"
Sony a6300.



Jake James Dougal. "The End of the World Isn't so Bad"
Sony a6300.






Laura Beaufils. "New Caledonia"

Laura is a photographer based in New Caledonia. Follow Laura's work @lbeaufils06 on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).




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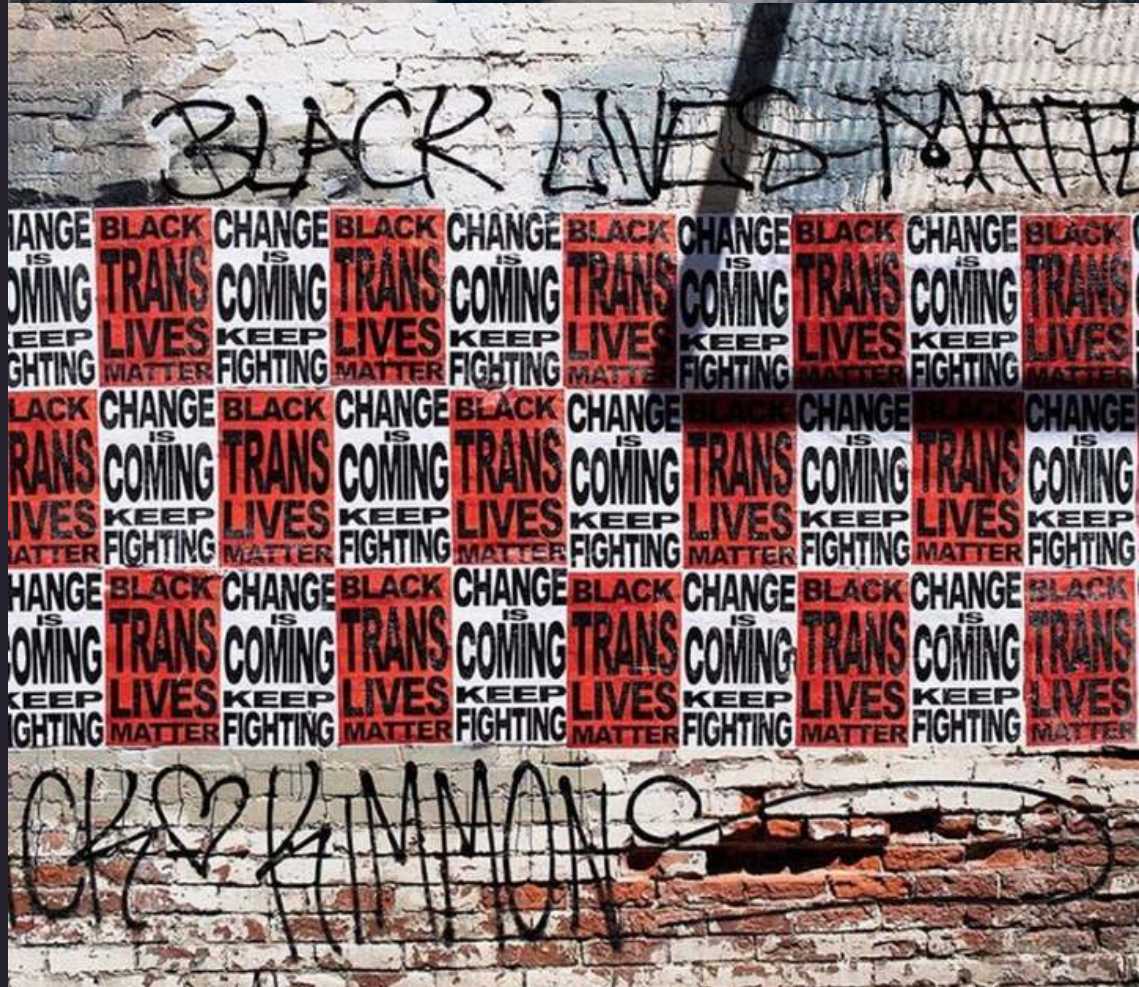
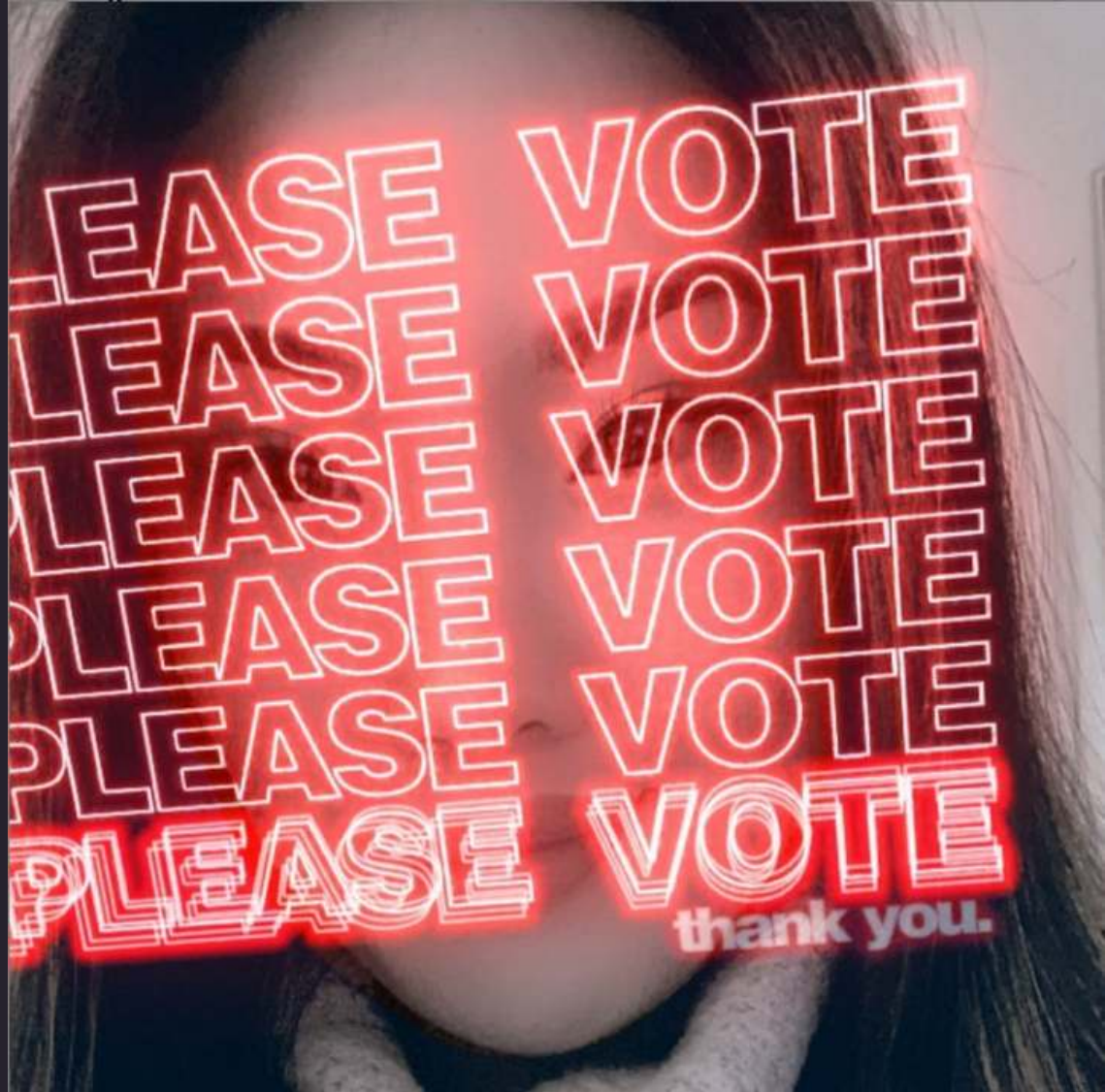


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Top Image: From Jessica Xie's Instagram account (@jessxie).

Bottom image: Black Lives Matter mural by Salomé (@chromae.s) in Portland, Oregon.

Liberté, Egalité, Communauté

An interview with Jessica Xie, Chairman for the City of Pasadena's Human Services Commission by Elizabeth Harris

Activist, Community Leader, and Entrepreneur, Jessica Xie is a proponent of equality and inclusivity in her community and everywhere she goes. When the pandemic hit, Jessica stepped in to support the homeless and the Black Lives Matter movement. I spoke with Jessica about her passions and activism during the pandemic.

Jessica you do a lot. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I wear a lot of hats. I am a Business Information Security Officer (BISO) for a large financial institution, and I also serve as the Chair for the City of Pasadena's Human Services Commission. As a BISO, I help shape our global cyber strategy and ensure it is integrated back into the business. In my capacity as a Commissioner, I help bridge the gap in equity, diversity, and inclusion for the City's human services, which impact the unhoused, foster care youth, and other vulnerable population groups within the City.

Due to the global pandemic, we are focused on our homeless population because CDC regulations have led many homeless shelters to reduce their bed size--some by 70%. I'm working to make sure those displaced by COVID-19 are not forgotten and properly cared for. I am weary to call myself an activist because I know activists who do incredible work. I graciously accept being put in this category, but do not feel worthy of the honor. I do my

best to educate my community, so in turn, they can educate theirs. I firmly believe you change the world by changing the world around you.

You've spoken a lot about how your background has influenced this passion for activism, raising social issues, and equity. Can you tell us about that? You are a great example of a fighter!

I am a first-generation American, but in another life, I would have been fourth-generation. It was due to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that my great grandmother was wrongly deported to China, a country she's never been to. In one fell swoop, she lost her home, life, and friends, and was forced to start anew in a foreign land. It wasn't until 40 years later after the act was repealed that my grandmother was able to reclaim her citizenship and immigrate her family back to the US.

I was raised in a Chinese household in a predominantly Latinx neighborhood with gang-presence. The Christmases we didn't celebrate at

home, I spent drinking champurrado and playing Loteria with my friends and their family. And although I embraced their culture, they didn't always embrace mine. My friends were often the same people who put me down because of my ethnicity.

I grew up ashamed to be Chinese—ostracized even. From the eye-tugging and name calling to ignorant questions like if I ate dog, being Chinese became very inconvenient. On top of going to school, being a first-generation meant being the family correspondent, test prep tutor, translator, and secretary—all at the young age of 9. Because immigration policies taught us to assimilate, I grew resentful towards my family for not learning English, not realizing they didn't have the time or resources to learn a new language while juggling multiple jobs to put food on the table.

Because of the model minority myth, where Asians are perceived and expected to be perfect, there was very little room to ask for help. At 10, I started my first graphic and web design business to help pay the bills. The idea that Asian Americans are monolithic, well-educated, and successful in nature is detrimental to society. There are a host of disparities within the Asian community that many overlook, but many use our perceived success to drive a wedge between other racial and ethnic minority groups.

Because of this myth, I was always given the benefit of the doubt in school. I saw the system work for me in ways it didn't work for my peers. They were targeted, marginalized, and funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. These families are similar to mine with histories of poverty, abuse, and neglect, who would have benefited from additional educational and counseling services, but instead, were isolated, punished, and pushed out.

Over the years, more and more of my peers would go missing, and I wouldn't know if they were missing because they didn't want to be found or if they were in jail—that is a closure many friends and families don't get. This is one of the reasons why stewardship is so dear to my heart.

I would be remiss if I didn't take all those lessons and channel them into creating equity for others.

You are engaged in a lot of community work. When the pandemic hit, what happened to all those groups? How did you adapt?

When the pandemic hit, the first people I thought of were families that depended on schools for meals. Many depend on schools to provide shelter, meals, and other resources that they may not have otherwise.

I grew up depending on free lunch as well, so I understand first-hand how difficult it may be. Once the pandemic hit, I reached out to local service providers and the local school district's Director of Health Programs to ensure those needs were still being met.

I was also reaching out to seniors and registered them to Great Plates, a state program that provides three meals a day for California's older adults. In addition to that, I reached out to my community and offered to grocery shop for those who are at high risk of contracting COVID-19.

Aside from that, I wanted to ensure, again, that our homeless population had somewhere to go. Not only was I working with our Commission's school district appointee, but I was also reaching out to our local shelters because many have had to reduce their bed size by 60-70%. Paired with the economic downturn and folks already living at or below poverty, it's the perfect storm. We are going to see a significant increase in the homeless population.

Some experts predict as many as 250,000 will become homeless. That's why these eviction moratoriums are so important. That's why these local, state, and federal programs are so critical to our communities. That's why we need to be more engaged in politics and stay informed.

You've been active in supporting the Black Lives Matter group and getting information out to your community of COVID 19 during the pandemic. What are some of the things you have achieved that you are proud of?

Hands down, it would be education. There are so many significant moments in history that are left out of history books, and it's our responsibility to teach ourselves and actively seek the truth. There are folks that argue, "Slavery was over a 100 years ago and we shouldn't have to pay for the wrong doings of our ancestors." To those critics, I ask what are you doing now that creates a better system? How are you using your privilege to create equity for others?

Society has targeted, marginalized, and exploited the black community for centuries. Listen to the pioneers of hip hop. That genre served as a vehicle for social protest. Listen to the lyrics. The vernacular used and imagery lyricized exposes daily struggles in underserved communities. They are calling out for help. How many artists have you heard reflect on doing time in exchange for their family?

That's a system that we created. That's a system everyone needs to come to terms with and really understand, so we can move forward collectively.

With respect to Black Lives Matter, how many

people were killed after George Floyd? Because he certainly wasn't the last. We are in the middle of a modern-day civil war. The list did not start with George or Breonna or Dominique Fells and Riah Milton, but it needs to end now.

Educating my community has been so fulfilling, but the path forward is on all of us. It starts with challenging what you know, becoming more civically engaged, educating not only yourself, but your family and friends. This is something we need to do together; this is on all of us.

What are some of the issues and initiatives you want to focus on?

Everyone should have the resources to achieve the American Dream. As a global leader, we need to take responsibility for the impact we have on the world and denounce policies that are detrimental to society like the profiteering of punishment and criminalization of poverty. Some issues I am fighting for:

- **Universal Healthcare.** Americans should not be denied healthcare because we put them in a system where they cannot afford it.
- **Clean Energy.** Renewable energy is not only more efficient, resilient, and reliable, but it also improves human health by providing better air quality. If we do not take care of the Earth, there will be no Earth to inhabit.
- **Eradicating Homelessness.** There are an estimated 553,742 people in the United States experiencing homelessness on any given night. We have work to do (e.g. housing first; affordable, bridge, and low-income housing).
- **Education Reform.** Trump started a culture war by exploiting the fact that we, as a nation, do not have the same baseline of facts. "Those who do not learn history are destined to repeat it."
- **Criminal Justice Reform.** We need a system founded on accountability, rehabilitation, and restorative justice.

We need to start thinking about the future and be proactive instead of reactive. What kind of example do we want to be for others? What space do we want to create for our grandchildren? What possibilities do we want to make available for future generations?



Jessica Xie, Chairman of the City of Pasadena's Human Services Commission.



Jessica Xie

How can we support you, your work, your initiatives?

Follow my journey on Instagram [@jessxie](#). My goal has always been to empower folks to make positive contributions to their community. You have so much potential to make a difference. Nobody knows your community better than you.

If there is an issue that concerns you or needs to be brought to attention, feel free to reach out to me. I would love to learn more and connect you to the right resources. Everybody's story is important.

Are there any groups, charities, or organizations you would like to give a shoutout to?

Shoutout to all the citizen journalists who risk their lives to expose the truth behind what's going on in our streets; the protestors who show up every single day to fight for their rights; the folks who educate their community and mobilize them into action.

Shoutout to Black Wealth Matters, which is an educational series put together by my friend Serria Rego. She's put together a great group of industry experts, from various walks of life, to talk about issues that impact black wealth. From race and politics to educational activism, this is a series I encourage everyone to check out. For more information, visit [@BWMseries](#) on Instagram.

Keep up to date with Jessica's work and her campaign by following her [@jessxie](#) on Instagram.

Restarting with Life Startup

By Natalya Permyakova

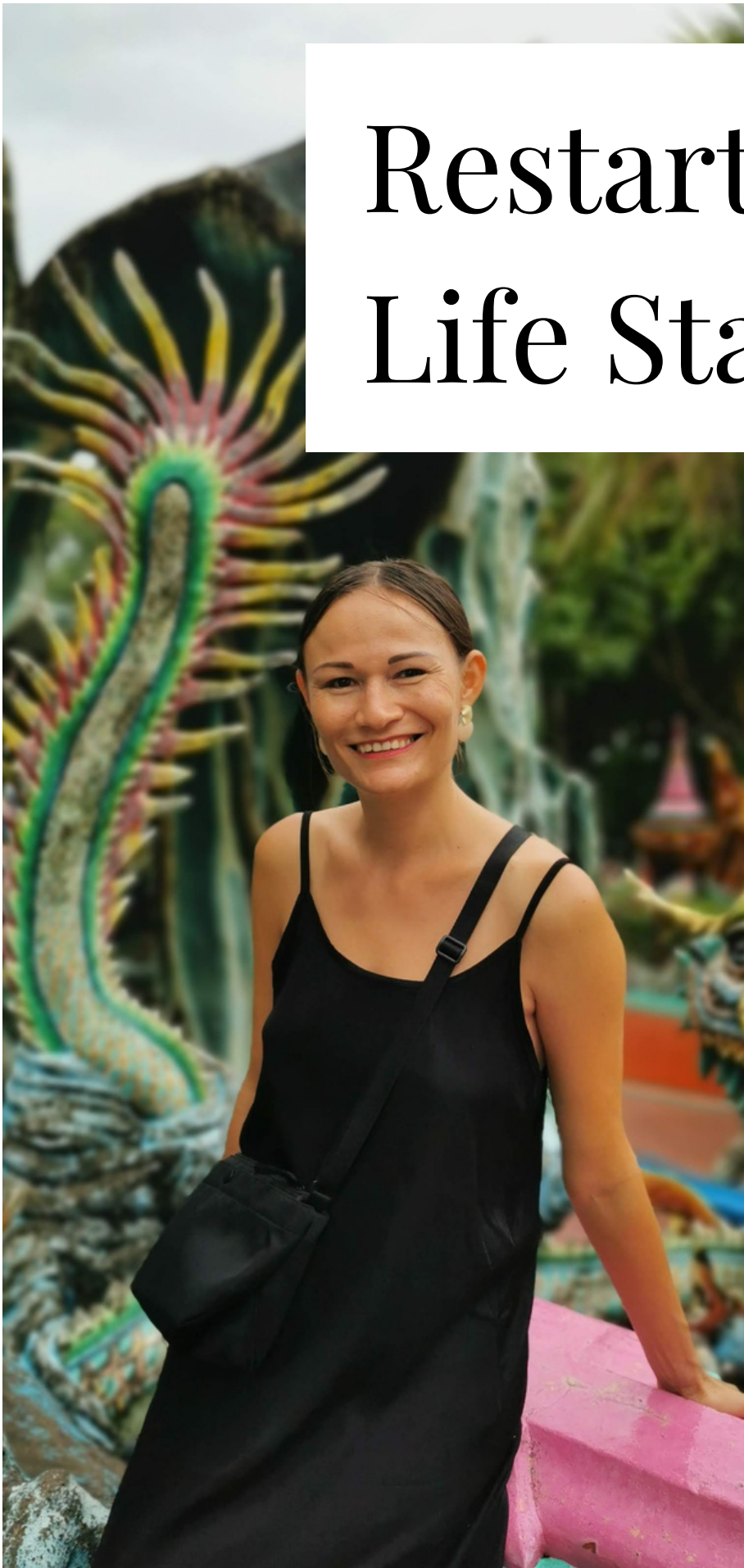
COVID-19 ended up one of the best things that happened to me this year, despite all the plans to travel the world that got canceled.

Why? It created the perfect conditions for finally launching my business, something I've been dreaming of for years.

Having spent years in a corporate career in London, I decided to take a break to travel the world and figure out what to do next. Everything was going according to plan, until I arrived in Seoul in February 2020, where I got stuck when the whole world closed international borders.

While it was easy to freak out about all the canceled plans and uncertainty, I embraced it and left South Korea five months later with a fully running international business.

The idea to launch Life Startup evolved over time, as all pieces of the puzzle were coming together. I spent years advising CEOs of large companies on growth strategies and





Natalya founded Life Startup when spending lockdown in Seoul, South Korea due to border closures due to the pandemic.

was stunned by how individuals don't take as nearly a rigorous approach to their life. I wanted to change that. I created a set of tools to help people navigate what's coming and all the new work, life and relationship models in a structured way to figure out how to make the most of their future and life.

This is how Life Startup was born, as a next-generation personal development space for those who want to be chefs, not just cook, and for those, who have what it takes to pave their own path. At Life Startup, we call them trailblazers.

We offer coaching programs for people who are stuck in life or feel they have more potential than they are currently realizing, and cover topics such as life strategy, life design, financial freedom, career development, and more.

Life Startup as it is today wasn't nearly the same 6-7 months ago. It started as a simple WordPress blog where I was sharing my experience with figuring out my own life strategy and designing my own dream life. Gradually over time, as I was researching more about the market and testing value propositions with customers, it evolved.

While launching a business, especially during the global pandemic, might be full of uncertainty, it can be rewarding too. I signed my first paying customer 4 months after the idea was born and incorporated a .

fully functioning international business after 6 months. Today, we are a community of over a thousand people and rapidly growing.

One of the most exciting things that happened since the launch of Life Startup, was all the help I got from other people. And not just friends and family. As I was overwhelmed with all the tasks needing to be done and wishing to move faster, I created several volunteer roles on our website. It was a long shot – to have people help without a paycheck. Little did I expect to receive 36 applications from all over the world in less than 48 hours! This only proved my hypotheses that often purpose and belonging to a group of like-minded people can mean more than a paycheck.

If you are an early-stage entrepreneur and can't afford to hire a team, see if you can attract like-minded people who would be excited by your start-up's purpose. You'd be surprised how many people will be willing to help in an exchange for growth and experience that you can offer them in return.

Today we are a team of 20+ coaches and volunteers, working hard on a mission to make the world more fulfilled. For example, we are developing a digital coaching program to help people become more fulfilled in life. Not everyone can afford to hire an actual coach, so we want to bridge that gap by using technology, such as AI and machine learning.

Is there ever a perfect time to start a business? Yes, it's now. One of our design principles at Life Startup is 'bias towards action'. Instead of staying in your head and missing out on the opportunities life presents, get out of your head and into your life. Do things, you might fail, you might learn, you might fail better next time. What matters, is that you are moving towards your vision.

Natayla Permyakova is an entrepreneur, artist, writer, yoga teacher, and an all-around trailblazer. She is the founder, CEO, and life coach at her coaching company Life Startup.

You can check out Life Startup and book a session at www.yourlifestartup.com. To stay up to date with what is happening with Natalya and Life Startup, follow them at [@yourlifestartup](#) on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

Check out Natalya's artwork on page 31.



A sneak peek into Life Startup's signature program, Life Strategy Quest.

Renewing Joy In Parenting

An interview with Renewed Motherhood founder, Cynthia Walgenbach, by Elizabeth Harris

Being a parent is hard and in lockdown, even harder. This is where mom of 4, certified Parent Coach, and founder of Renewed Motherhood, Cynthia Walgenbach, comes in. Launched in the middle of the pandemic, Cynthia started Renewed Motherhood to help other parents connect more deeply with their children and break free from patterns of anger and feeling overwhelmed. I chatted with Cynthia about motherhood, entrepreneurship and COVID-19 family life.

Cynthia, what is a parent coach? What led you to become a parent coach?

I like to think of a parent coach like a personal trainer for parents. But instead of helping you get physically fit, I help parents strengthen their relationship with their kids and learn how to connect with them more deeply.



How has the pandemic been for you and your family?

You know, it's been hard and it's been a blast. I love having everyone close and getting to be involved in their day to day activities. It's nice to pop in and see what they are doing for school. At the same time, it has been draining and lonely in certain ways. Parents, especially moms, are being asked to literally do it all and it can be super overwhelming.

Where did the inspiration for Renewed Motherhood come from? How are you running your coaching business remotely?

It really came from my own experience of motherhood. You know, I am an idealist at heart, but the way I was parenting was not in line with my values and my relationship with my kids was suffering for it. So when I saw an invitation online to learn more about conscious parenting, I jumped on board. I really wanted to show up for my kids in a more compassionate way, and taking the time to explore why I reacted the way I did and why some of my kid's behaviors triggered me so much changed things for me.

As far as working remotely...well, the upside of experiencing a pandemic in 2020 is that there is no lack of technology! So I can still meet with clients via Zoom or GoogleMeets. I think like a lot of parents who have a more flexible work schedule or who are juggling working from home with childcare, the challenge is more about carving out the time to dedicate to reflection and change. As a mom, it's easy to put my stuff on the back burner. I have to remind myself of my purpose and how important this work is. It's also good to remind myself how much better I feel after I take time to focus on my own pursuits.

What are some tips that our readers with families can take away?

If the way you've been doing things in your family is not giving you the results you want, don't be afraid to change it up. If your child is 7 or 10 or 15 years old, it's not too late to have a new relationship with them.

When we as parents show up in a mindful compassionate way, our kids respond to that. Our responses shape so much

What's next for Renewed Motherhood for now and after the pandemic?

The plan is to continue serving families as much as I can! I always love learning more about healing and how we can help our kids develop resilience and grow into these really emotionally and mentally well-balanced people. So, I can't wait to share with my clients as I continue to learn.

Are there any charities or organizations you would like to give a shout out to?

I really love the work that Compassion International is doing helping lift children out of poverty. Their child sponsorship program has also been really wonderful for my kids in terms of learning about children from other parts of the world, learning how to have empathy, and cultivating gratitude in their own lives.

"When we as parents show up in a mindful compassionate way, our kids respond to that. Our responses shape so much!"

Follow Cynthia and [Renewed Motherhood](#) @renewed_motherhood on Instagram and @RenewedMotherhood on Facebook. To learn more and to book a session with her, check out her website www.renewedmotherhood.com.



Cynthia pictured with her 4 amazing children.

Conversations

AN INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER AJOSE
BY EMER O' SHEA

OUTTAKES



Esther, a former colleague of Elizabeth and I, runs Outtakes (@outtakes_truthuncut) on Instagram.

Outtakes is 'normalising those uncomfortable conversations'. Previous conversations include 'Allyship', 'Intersectionality' and 'Checking in'. A thoughtful, graceful force to be reckoned with, Ester is a cheerleader and inspiration to all, I count myself blessed to be part of her tribe.

We had a conversation about conversations.

Esther, firstly, thank you for doing this. Let's start bluntly – how has your 2020 been?

It's a pleasure to be part of this storytelling and life-affirming in a soft-landing way project. Ha! I feel like we're all asking each other that every other week. It feels like a year of reckoning. As if the world got tired of how we treated it, and each other, and demanded retribution, both on a macro and a micro-level. It's been a challenging year, more this year than ever, a year of growth that doesn't feel linear or like growth at all. It's been odds-defying, but also definitely a year of mirroring; mirroring back to me, mirroring back to us, what we've been giving out.

You, in my opinion, are a master conversationalist. Has 2020 changed how you converse with people, for better or worse?

I do believe that people meet you at the level of vulnerability you enter a conversation with, so any conversation worth its salt that I've had, that's left fragments of itself with me, has been because the other person, has shown up, fully too.

I think 2020 has put a laser focus on the way I talk to myself. I'm at once softer with myself, and simultaneously more impatient about staying in dialogues that may not serve me. That, naturally, has coloured the conversations I'm having with others. This is because of all the things that have occurred (still occurring) in 2020; the pandemic, lockdown, the re-ignition of BLM dialogue due to the horrifying deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the political landscape, the US election.... I mean, whew, 2020 has been a trip. But on the other hand, it's opened up an arena of conversations that are honest, raw, and unrelenting of gives and takes.

So, yes. The way I converse with people has evolved. Whether it's through Friday cocktails over Zoom, Instagram lives and cultivating an online collective tribe that are engaged and hungry for on-going impact-driven conversations, or one-on-one social distancing walks in the park, the conversations have, like trees planted by the river, blossomed into what's necessary and sprouting good fruits.

As for how I hope this translates for the future? In moments of disaster and crises, where life proves itself to be surprising, there has been an energising movement, where the conversations we are

having demand that it should be outside of ourselves, more than our own stories alone.

Even in that question "Hey what's up, any news?" because you just don't know what and where you will find the person you're talking to emotionally. There is a way disaster throws people into the present, and gives them a supersaturated sense of immediacy, that also includes a deep sense of connection. It's as though, in some violent gift, we've been given an awakening where we are deeply in the present and can let go of the past and the future and our personal narratives in some ways. We have this shared experience with everyone around us and can now find what is a direct connection with people. And that, I think, I hope, is what should define how we carry the learnings of this year into the conversations of the future signs or symbols.



If you had to describe 'Outtakes' to a complete stranger in 5 words. Go!

Conversation Menu for Open Humans

What was your biggest surprise moment from 'Outtakes'?

Honestly, the engagement, the tribe, the connectedness. I don't know what I expected. Perhaps nothing at all. I'm not the engine that drives Outtakes, nor, really is it even the guests. It's those conversations that are happening in the comments section. How the tribe feed into us and us into them. Ensuring that whilst the conversation may start on outtakes, facilitated by two people, it never really ends there. And what I miss most whilst Outtakes is on a season break, is the variety, buoyancy, rich, and nuanced conversations in the comment section.

Also, how much people look forward to it. I've been getting strongly worded (but encouraging) emails asking when we're picking up for the next season of Outtakes.

Do you have plans to continue Outtakes in the future?

Yes! OMG....even if I didn't, the people have spoken. We're trying to ensure that the conversations continue to resonate, and have an impact. It's been a tough year...so that's impacted our timelines somewhat, but we'll definitely be back, sooner, rather than later.

Can we expect more Outtakes soon?

We're actually planning a roundtable of sort like this in the future with all the guests returning!

#Quick Fire Questions

1 If you had to describe 'Outtakes' to a complete stranger in 5 words. Go!
Conversation Menu for Open Humans

2 In a post-COVID-19 world, you can invite 5 people to take part in a special 'Outtakes' reunion. Who?
I'd have everybody in the comment section...and my mum. Because that's where the party is at.

3 What would you serve?
Wine, obviously, and for the culture, plantain. and meat pie.





Reviving Cinema in Beijing

By Jasmine Xie

I was back in my hometown Dalian, China, getting ready to celebrate the festivities of Chinese New Year, on the day that COVID-19 became real. I remember having dinner with my family and overhearing the waiters talk about a flu that has been going around. I remember walking out of the restaurant to take a family photo without masks for what would be the last time in a long time.

I run a creative talent management company called Nova Universal, our incredibly international and diverse team work as the management of behind-the-scenes creators such as directors, cinematographers, and photographers. Amongst the

small businesses stifled by the virus, we were one of the lucky ones because our monthly expenditure has always been kept low thanks to a streamlined business and collaborative work model. Nevertheless, our business thrives on physical shoots, physical shoots require a team of creators to work in one location together, and that was simply not possible under the circumstances. Just as many others felt the need to drive digital innovation, so did we.

The director I represent, who is also a long term business partner of mine, took the initiative to start a motion pictures studio named Forthoght during this time. Much of our lockdown days were

Image: Jasmine Xie (left) founder of Nova Universal photographed with her mother, Shiyang Zhang (right).



A picture from the Women in Media China Film Services that was hosted in partnership with Nova Universal and Cinker Pictures.

spent looking over Articles of Association and planning Instagram content for Forthoght, to at least digitally jumpstart the corporation. Despite a scattered team across different parts of the globe, these dire times only helped to highlight that our love for cinema is what will carry us past this mess that the world made.

For those of us in China, we have been fortunate enough to heal and continue on with business and life almost as usual now. When Beijing lifted its restrictions on large gatherings, our team held an intimate film screening for the Women in Media community of Beijing. We knew that the film industry was in much need of rejuvenation, and we wanted to create that opportunity for the microenvironment within our reach.

From dealing with facilitating remote shoots, to relying on a stable internet connection to make up for the lack of physicality, it is needless to say that COVID has changed our work and personal lives in ways unimaginable. Times like these have helped me realise that being able-bodied is a blessing. And for those that can trudge on, head forth and help carry a few weary along the way if you abundantly can.

Jasmine Xie is the CEO and Founder of [Nova Universal](#) a creative talent and production agency based in Beijing, Hong Kong, and London. She is also the Executive Director of [Forthoght](#), a motion pictures and media company based in Nigeria.

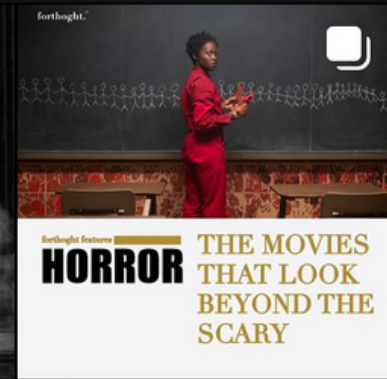
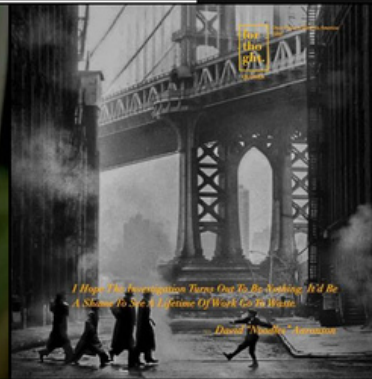
You can keep up to date with Jasmine [@jasminexiez](#) on Instagram. Jasmine is also part of [Unleash Today](#) and a contributing expert to their book that will be launching early 2021.

Keep up to date with Nova Universal [@NovaUniversal](#) on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

Follow Forthoght [@forthoght](#) on Instagram.



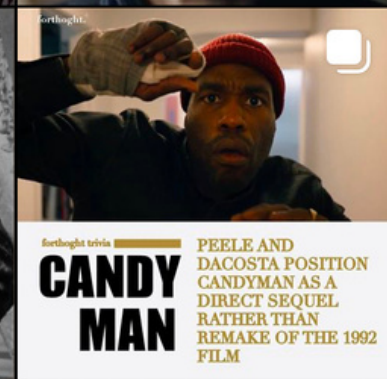
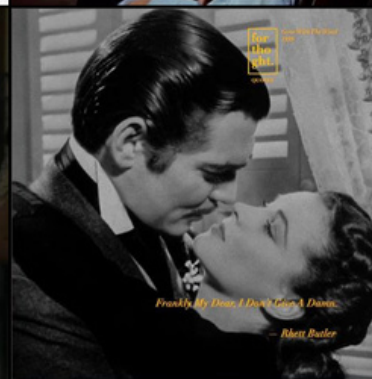
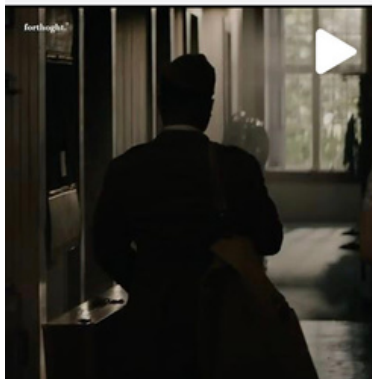
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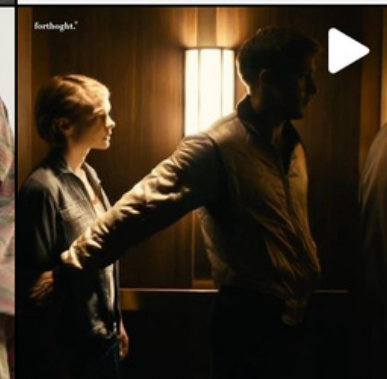
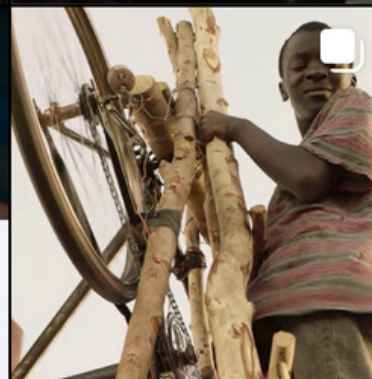
HORROR THE MOVIES THAT LOOK BEYOND THE SCARY



MANK BLACK AND WHITE WITH A SIDE OF HOLLYWOOD PANACHE



CANDY MAN PEELE AND DACOSTA POSITION CANDYMAN AS A DIRECT SEQUEL RATHER THAN REMAKE OF THE 1992 FILM



MINARI LEE ISAAC CHUNG: IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NOW YOU KNOW



THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME A FILM THAT SHOULD BE A MINI-SERIES

When Covid Closed Doors, A New Type of Zoom Opened

By Stacey Sharp



March 2020. The world hit the brakes and came to a screeching halt. At the time, I was enjoying a full life as a wife, mother of five boys, online law professor, and certified Schwinn spin instructor. I was home now, without a gym to teach my spin classes.

The kids were also now home but I still had more pedaling and inspiring to do. Being furloughed didn't mean I was going to stop how I loved to start each day. Within the first week of the shutdown, I had a full screen of friends joining me on Zoom to spin, walk, run, and hike. I didn't realize at the time, but I was off and running with my new Zoom gym.

Urockfit. The name says it all. A place where "You" and I can join together and become more fit - in body, mind and spirit. People tell me they enjoy my classes because I am able to break down barriers, inclusive of all levels of fitness and for all, however they want to join class. People feel safe and comfortable, riding, walking, running, hiking, and some even join from bed when recovering from illness because they don't want to miss the thoughts generated by class.

And, I want people to leave my class feeling like they rocked it, putting their best foot forward. It hurts me when I listen to people who sell themselves short, whose confidence and self-esteem have been affected for one reason or

another. So part of me just wanted to bring people together and say, "Hey, we're tossing those negative thoughts out the window, jumping on the bike, the roads, the trails and we're just going to rock it today." Because in the end, don't we all just want to walk into a business meeting, a court appearance, a presentation, a classroom, our homes and say the same? This is what Urockfit is all about.

For me, fitness has always been a family affair. I have four brothers and one sister, and all six of us were born within ten years. I grew up in a rural town with bike and horse trails nearby. We always had a playmate, a teammate, a biker, etc. Every afternoon, if we weren't inside studying, we were outside playing. The balance of physical and mental exercise successfully propelled us forward in life as we all became doctors, lawyers, or successful businessmen. I carried these practices of mental and physical activity throughout life, and it is still an important part as my own family grows.

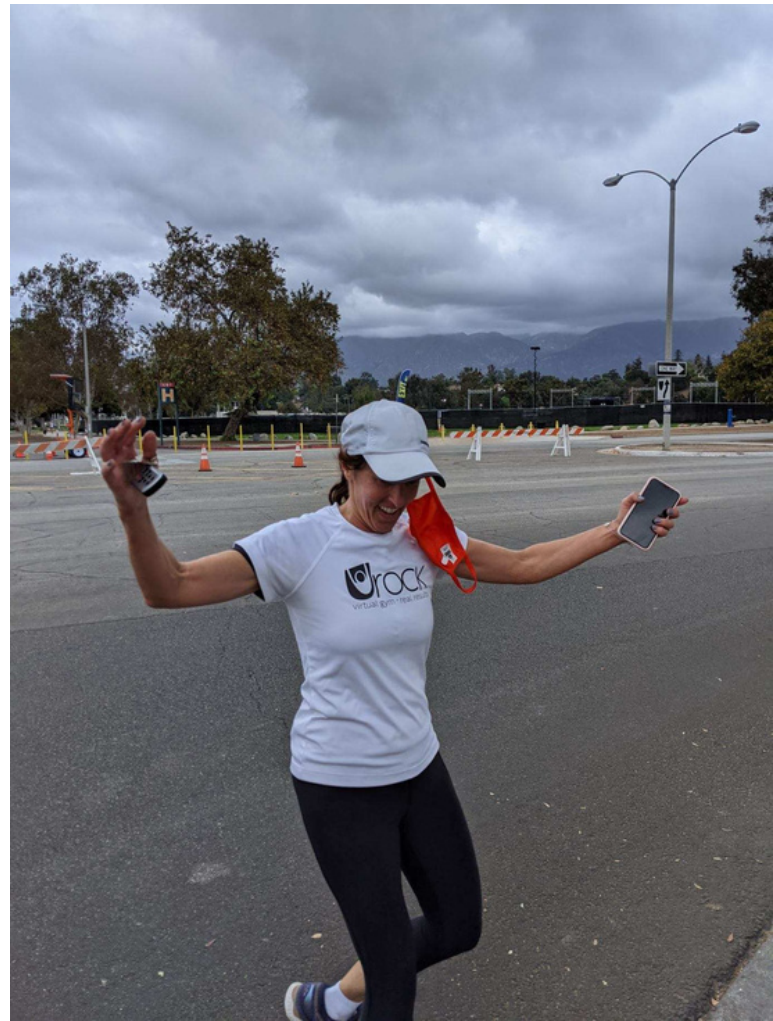
I am an attorney-turned-law professor. Throughout college, and especially during law school, I continued my physical fitness, even though I really didn't have the time for it. I was studying long hours, the editor of our law paper, competing on the oral argument team in state-wide competitions, and all the while falling deeper in love with my then soon-to-be-husband of now twenty-four years.

The local gym became the outlet I needed for dealing with stress, all-day sitting sessions in the classroom and law library. I had my own routine on cardio machines, and remember watching spin and aerobics classes from afar. Never did it occur to me then, that I would ever lead one of my own. In fact, I never even took a group exercise class until after I had my first son, about ten years later. But I always looked on, and thought maybe... one day. Maybe one day, I would get the courage to try a class, knowing how uncoordinated and awkward I would feel because I was so set in my own routine, my own comfort zone.

Fast forward to December 2019. My family and I were on vacation in Israel and Jordan. In the middle of the Jordanian dessert, on camelback, my husband and I were discussing our goals for the upcoming year. I remember saying to him, "I turn 50 next year and I would like to accomplish two things: (1) participate in a triathlon, and (2) open my own gym." In my mind, I thought the triathlon was the sure thing.

When we returned from our trip, my training began. I am not a runner but my son the runner taught me proper form and stride. I am not a swimmer, but I learned the proper freestyle stroke with a swimming coach and friend. The biking part I had down.

So, why a triathlon when I only had 1 of the 3 sports somewhat mastered? For me, it's about the journey... truly starting at a starting line and seeing who



Stacey at her Urock Tri finish line.

I meet, what I learn, and enjoying the adventure along the way even if there are unexpected setbacks or obstacles that need to be hurdled in order to make it to the eventual finish line. In mid-February, I registered for the Herbalife Triathlon. I was on a clear path to the triathlon when suddenly everything shut down due to the pandemic, including the Herbalife Triathlon.

On the morning of March 16, I went hiking with a friend when she asked if we could continue spinning together online through Zoom. I didn't have a spin bike at home, but after asking around, my incredibly generous neighbor lent me hers, after all, there was at least a 3 month wait to order one. Soon I was back doing what I loved. Word traveled fast and by March 23, I had a full screen of people joining me on Zoom. I didn't realize at the time, but the roots were established for creating my new Zoom gym.

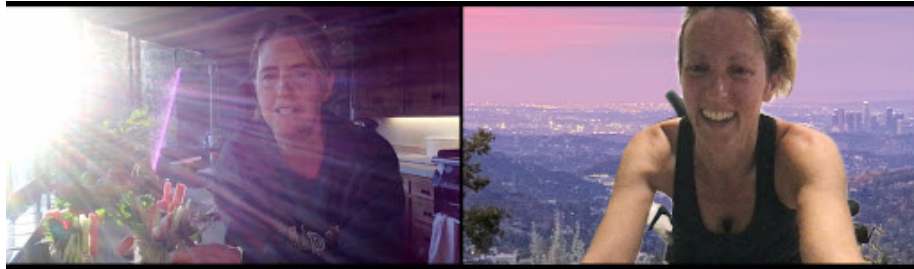
In July, covid restrictions continued, and Urockfit.com opened as a family business. Since the boys didn't go to summer camp, summer camp came home. One son designed the website, one built the

content, one did market pricing analysis, one took pictures, and one gave input. Urockfit became a family affair. Meanwhile, the Herbalife Triathlon canceled so Urock took over. The goals I set on camelback in the Jordanian desert quickly became a reality, as Urock opened and I was going to accomplish my tri Urock style with fellow Urockers. And, a triathlon done Urock style is where we customize three legs that best fit each individual to be our best versions of ourselves. For some of us, it is swim, bike, run while others select to read, write, dance. And, I haven't stopped there.

Urockfit has also become a place to explore and learn about all the fun and delicious ways to incorporate healthy foods into our diets. While working in gyms, I found that most people shied away from talking about food; there were many taboos around the topic of "diets." Healthy eating is critical to our mental and physical fitness. Without fueling the body appropriately, we can't fully achieve our fitness goals. So, every Friday my friend Michele Doud (of Farm and Fig Catering) joins the class as we're cooling down and stretching. She shares her ideas and recipes for fun

connections and sometimes we each take turns sharing thoughts about the theme of the week during recovery times throughout the hour workout. Some themes last several weeks as each person wants a turn to share depending on the topic. Others prefer to share outside of class on our private chat. Some days, I believe that class begins when the Zoom ends. While I always want the physical workout to be challenging, it is most gratifying to me when the deep thought continues in our private chat.

And still, we keep pedaling on and have so many more adventures ahead of us and so many more people to meet. We continue to challenge ourselves with monthly goals, even where it isn't necessarily fitness based. It's about trying new things outside the Zoom class that we've always wanted to do, but never made the time for. Whether it's trying new foods like marshmallow root, or being inspired to make your own bone broth through our Fresh Fit Fridays, or discovering you are stronger than you think you are, as we push our legs and fitness levels higher, it's about leaving the Zoom and knowing that Urock.



Stacey with Michelle Doud of [Farm and Fig Catering](#) at Urockfit's Fresh Fit Friday nutrition talk.

ways to make healthier choices, often using something right out of her garden, or picked fresh from her fruit trees! Taking the concept of "farm to table" to its finest, Michele also explains how the nutritional benefits of the ingredients affect our bodies. Getting to know and love the foods we can grow at home, while making better choices as we shop, is key to our optimal fitness. Together, we hope to break down the taboo of food and truly enjoy the healthier choices that fuel our bodies.

Aside from daily rides and nutrition talks, we created monthly challenges. Each month, we complete a two hour "Zoomathon" pedalling, walking, running, or hiking to a themed playlist. Our outdoorsmen and women take pictures to record their accomplishments while the spin zoomers enjoy the view they bring to the screen. Also, each month I encourage my fellow Urockers to try a new lifestyle from a "Good Habit Challenge" to a month long of gratitude themed rides. Sometimes we pair up so that we develop deeper

Every weekday at 6:15 a.m., we get back in the saddle. We ride along to songs that make us dive deeper in thought, to themes that help us grow and become better people, all while challenging our physical fitness. We have developed a support group that celebrates and encourages one another, whether it's the way we push through a challenging ride, celebrate a birthday, or share a funny story, we are in it together. As our walkers, runners, and hikers pace with us on Zoom, they capture sunrises, colorful fall leaves, mountain scapes, and the wagging tails of their dogs. It's these shared perspectives that come together in our class and remind us of life's beauty in the simple things. We really are stronger together when we share the beauty around us, and celebrate the good in each other.

What are you doing tomorrow morning at 6:15 (Pacific)? Zoom with us as we ride, walk, hike or run! Inquire and signup on [Urockfit.com](#). Follow us on [@urockfitness](#) on Instagram and [@urockfit](#) on Facebook.

How to Be A Mental Health Lived Experience Advocate in a Pandemic

An interview with activist and advocate, Katrina McIntosh, by Elizabeth Harris



Katrina McIntosh is a lifelong advocate and activist for persons with mental health conditions or those experiencing mental distress. When the pandemic hit and closed many resources, she saw an opportunity to start her non-profit, Persons With Mental Illness (PWMI), to create digital safe spaces and change mental health systems. I talked with Katrina about mental health, the pandemic, and how we can apply a lived experience lens to our everyday

Katrina, you founded our own non-profit. Can you tell us about PWMI?

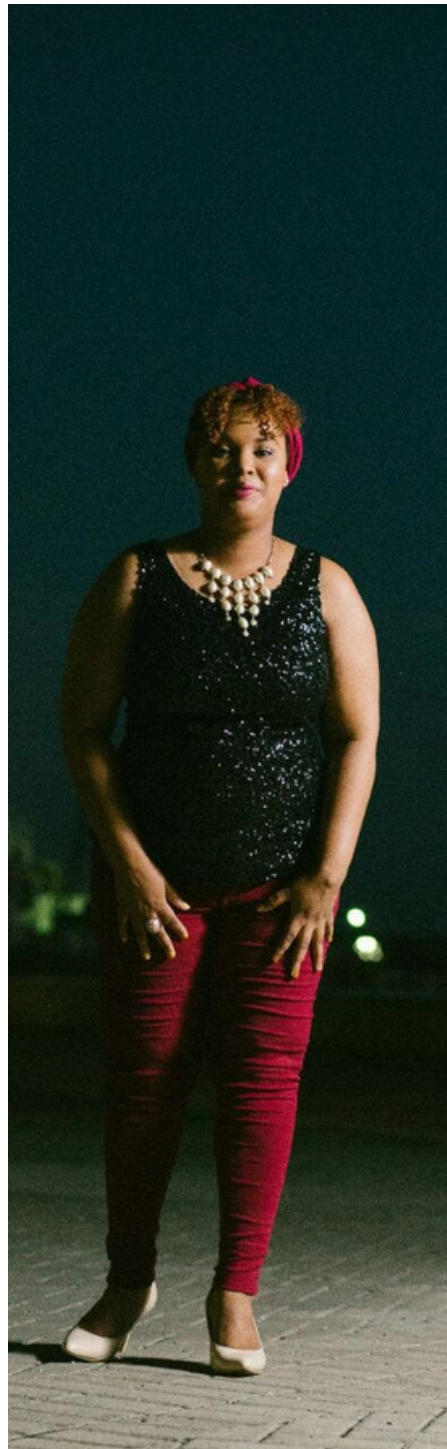
PWMI is an organization that seeks to provide digital interventions for persons living with mental health conditions. It does it in a way that combines the clinical model, which is typical in mental health organizations, with the lived experienced aspect. Lived experience is new to some mental health spaces. It involves persons with mental health conditions dictating their own services and being experts of their own care.

Imagine someone with a mental health condition collaborating with a clinician or a social worker through a digital app, or web interface, telling them what they want their services to look like. That's the unique aspect of PWMI.

I know Mental Health and advocacy is a passion of yours. Where does this come from?

I am a person who lived with bipolar disorder since I was 16 years old. It has a medical link in that I believe I may be a second or third generation person in my family with this disorder. I'm not sure. Mental health or mental illness was not spoken about when I was growing up. My bipolar disorder was brought on even more because I experienced a lot of childhood trauma, a lot of abuse, a lot of neglect, even sexual trauma. Imagine, 16-year-old Katrina experiencing these symptoms of bipolar and depression and not knowing what the hell it was and having no one to talk to about it.

Then, a catastrophe happened at 20 when my dad passed away, and now my life is completely spinning out of control.



Katrina in her home country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Even in all of that, I was always passionate about helping people and helping people who are going through what I went through and changing world systems.

Even though in my country [Trinidad and Tobago], I wasn't able to get very employable jobs related to mental health. I was able to get jobs within domestic violence spaces, child protection spaces. I worked at the Rape Crisis and Coalition Against Domestic Violence and for a child protection agency for some time.

My lens has always been this social justice activism lens. How can we change this friggled up system? That's my mindset. Just changing systems and being this strongarm telling people, "You're doing sh*t. Do better!"

Wow! You have been a survivor, a conqueror, a hero through your journey.

That hasn't been easy. When you're a trailblazer, you realize how much people don't want you on your trail. You realize how much opposition you can have. I am a pansexual woman, who is a feminist and a black rights activist and doesn't care to get married and has a mental health condition and openly talks about having a mental health condition and is okay with that. I'm okay with people knowing, but a lot of society is not okay with that. As progressive as we like to believe that we are, you realize that you get a lot of opposition, and you have to do a lot of convincing. You have to know your sh*t.

Katrina, you have been and continue to be very involved in the mental health community like the Global Mental Health Peer Network. What inspired you to bring PWMI to life?



Katrina showcasing her book, "Letters to the Broken, Healing & Healed."

I lost my job on the 18th of February, and we were put on lockdown at the beginning of March. I couldn't get a job, but I'm a workaholic, and I do genuinely love what I do.

I learned a lesson years ago from someone that when you're not working, when you don't have a job, work as if you do. Don't stop, especially if it's something that you're passionate about. Don't stop that momentum. That is essentially what I did.

At first, it wasn't easy. I experienced tons of disappointment and rejection. I felt like I was in a financial, emotional, even mental crisis trying to adapt to this unavoidable world event I couldn't control. But in May, there was Mental Health Awareness Week hosted by the Mental Health Foundation in the UK. This year's theme was kindness, what it means to be kind to someone with a mental health condition. I found this really interesting. For me, it combines what I am passionate about, which is the lived experience perspective, and helping persons within various world systems to understand what it feels like to live with a mental health diagnosis, as well as what it means to support someone with a mental illness.

For that reason, I started that week with a panel discussion where I brought together a lot of my peers from all over the world. There were people from Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, and India. It was just this beautiful space where a bunch of people who have mental health conditions, such as OCD, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, to just talk about the things that mattered to us.

For the first night, we talked about being kind to yourself if you have a mental health condition. Then about being kind to a partner who has a mental health condition. Then we delved into how can organizations be kind to a person with mental health conditions. Then how communities can be kind to a person with a mental health condition.

The discussions were just so rich and amazing. One of the things that was pointed out so many times was that we need these conversations to happen and we need more of these spaces. Besides having the conversations, we also just need spaces. We need spaces where we can share what it feels like to live with a mental health condition. We need spaces that are accepting of that and take that into context and listen to that.

That's the key aspect, listening to people who have mental health conditions and telling you what it's like to live with it and what they need to live with it.

PWMI just naturally developed from there.

How has PWMI help you and others during the pandemic?

The main thing that PWMI has done is that it created this amazing space. It started with an international forum for all these people to come together, express their experience, and then there was a shared commonality in the experiences.

It also created room for my team. I appreciate Candice, Moses, Elizabeth and Sannuthi, and Karen tremendously for believing in me and this work. For instance, with Sannuthi, she was exposed to the clinical world. She is now better able to advocate for those that she cares for and regularly support. I think the rest of my team are also learning this whole new approach to mental health and aiding those diagnosed.

For me personally, PWMI has given me hope. Whilst we aren't in a place where we anticipated to be, and where I wanted us to be, I still feel hope because something like this can even happen. That I can even talk about the lived experience perspective in mental health and combining it with clinical experience.

That I could get a cool co-executive director who shares that value system and supports this vision tremendously. That I can get a team around me who can see this way of creating a mental health system and can say this actually makes sense. Also, the fact that we can do this on a global landscape, my team resides in India, the US, Trinidad and Tobago, and Nigeria, gives me so much hope in this world and how we can come together to change it. The pandemic is awful. But it also furthered open a world stage that allowed all of us to come together.

What are some of the things you have achieved so far during this pandemic that you're really proud of for PWMI and for yourself?

Just creating it and just starting it, that's a big deal. Months ago, I would have never met my team. I would have never met all these amazing people who believe in me, even when I don't believe in myself sometimes, and believe in this vision and take it as their own. That's amazing.

I, also, really appreciate the fact that my work with PWMI, and my previous work, has opened this amazing door to work with Mental Health America and do such beautiful work there. Mental Health America is another organization that values the lived experience of persons with mental health conditions and values persons with mental health conditions being part of the process, not just a bystander. Because of both organizations, I've had wonderful experiences of just meeting other people in our field. We may be small in numbers, but we are there.

What is next for you and for PWMI? How can we support PWMI?

Next for PWMI is our website launch.

Support us by following us on social media, sharing our posts, and also contributing financially once we have our website up. Please contribute financially because it takes a lot of work and a lot of finances to get these things done.

Definitely volunteer with us. There is a lot of room for persons to

volunteer. We need the hands. This work is not easy, and I think my team will value more people being on board.

What advice do you have for others to be an ally? Or be a lived experience advocate? Or to be an engaged member of the mental health community?

Believe persons with mental health conditions. This is something that I've been trying to preach for some time now. Believe us.

I have had bipolar disorder since the age of 16, which means I have had so much time to understand myself and to know what works. To know the experience of getting medications and then taking them. I can tell you which medications give me which side-effects. I know that if I don't sleep a particular night, this is what I need to do to cope the next day. I know the times in the month, or the year, that are going to trigger me, and I can pinpoint what exactly those triggers are.

I have had time to understand living with a mental health disorder since I was the



Katrina in her home country of Trinidad and Tobago.

age of 16. That has given me a body of time to become the expert of my own life. Considering that I am the expert of my own life, I do not need a doctor, or clinician, or even a family or friend, not being an expert of my experience, dictating to me what I should or should not be doing. There is a part that they play, but that part has to incorporate me.

If we take it from that lens, then family, friends, mental health professionals, are really support systems. Support systems are supposed to support a key player. That key player is me. If we truly understood the nature of a support system then we won't treat a support system like they are the only experts in the room.

Believe us about our care.

Is there anyone or organization you would like to give a shoutout to?

I want to give a shoutout to my team! I really want to just commend the work that everyone single one of them does. I cannot do this work without them. PWMI is not about me.

Sannuthi, for being an awesome co-executive director, and a great clinical psychologist and giving me, and the whole team, that clinical lens we need. Moses, with all of his amazing development skills. Karen, with her beautiful eye for creative content. Candice and Elizabeth, for their hard work in our development department. My team has really done a great job of being dedicated to this effort and doing all that we need to do to make this organization succeed.

Thank you to all of you!

You can find more information on PWMI stay up to date with them by following them on social media [@stand.with.pwmi](#) on [Instagram](#) and [@StandWithPWMI](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). PWMI's website [standwithpwmi.org](#) will be launching this December.

Also, check out the wonderful work Mental Health America is doing at [www.mhanational.org](#). Follow them out on [Twitter](#) [@MentalHealthAm](#), and on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) [@MentalHealthAmerica](#).

Katrina has also written a book, "Letters to the Broken, Healing & Healed," that is part of The Letter Project. In her book, she utilizes poetry to offer advice and explore themes such as women's rights, gender-based violence, child abuse, and suicide. You can order it on [Amazon](#).



The logo for PWMI, the non-profit that Katrina found.

The truth is rarely pure and never simple

By Emer O'Shea

If asked, whether you could tell the difference between “fake” and “true” news, how would you reply? Irrespective of age, education or political allegiance, most of us are susceptible to political disinformation, conspiracy theories, miracle medical remedies or even damning gossip.

Social media and the internet is very hospitable to inaccuracies, and the more emotional valence (both goodness and badness) something has, the more likely people will share. The more novel, or surprising something is—eliciting a fearful response or a surprise joy—the more likely people will pass it along.

Distinguishing between nonsense and truth isn't always clear cut. We tend to go to the same sources and the same people, giving them more column inches, airwaves time, or 'likes'. We never challenge our own social and political bubbles or biases. We rarely apply scrutiny when something just doesn't sit right. We believe that which is consistent with and comfortable within our own ideologies. Confirming instead of challenging ingrained prejudices. By sharing more of the same, we create a ripple effect of falsehoods that can misinform.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I started (for a reason I still don't understand) to send a “Fact of the Day” to a group of friends. Every day, for 100 days, I made a slide with facts, stories and trivia to send out. I did themes, special occasions and in all instances tried to make it fun by adding pictures of dogs. Wildly fun, right?

Every day, I picked a topic, or decided upon something I wanted to learn more about, using it as an excuse to assimilate information on a random subject. I enjoyed it, spending dedicated time every day to learning. I had to make sure what I was sending was accurate, becoming obsessed with double checking various sources to validate my ‘facts’. On a couple of occasions, I had to scrap ideas if I thought they were in any way dubious.

Hold on— why is my little anecdote even relevant? Because, it reminded me that while not everything you read on the internet is true, it shouldn't stop us from using it to learn more about our world, the forgotten history that shapes us and our present day reality. I know more about Bubblewrap, Bees, Gold, Nobel Laureates, the Principality of Sealand, Ramadan and Ralph Bunche than I ever knew before. I didn't know what I didn't know, and I'm going to keep learning more of what I don't know. But hey, I'm sitting at home in a vacuum chamber of my own opinions, exacerbated by the boredom of 2020. I'm not the purveyor of truth— I'll remain indignant if you say otherwise!

Tips for Keeping the Christmas Cheer Alive in Lockdown

By Megan Lunney

Although the holidays may be slightly different than previous years' celebrations, it does not mean it has to be less jolly. So, before you try and fast forward into the new year, why not check out some tips below on how to keep the Christmas cheer alive in 2020.

1 Create an activity advent calendar.



Be your own inspiration and create yourself a 25-day activity advent calendar. All you need are some old cereal boxes, a pair of scissors, glue, paper, and as many crafts as you want. Once you have constructed your calendar, write yourself a handwritten card with one activity per day. You may not be able to add in external events such as Christmas markets and ice skating, but you can try toasting marshmallows by the fire, baking Christmas cookies, walking around your area, viewing your neighbors' festive lights – and that's only the beginning! A magical event does not need to be big or fancy, all you need is a little sparkle and you're good to go.



2 Support Local Businesses.

We'd be fooling ourselves if the word "presents" did not appear in our minds when we think about Christmas. The Barbie airplane Santa brought you at age 8, or the fresh set of PJs and fluffy socks from your kris kinkle, there is always a gift that lives in people's holiday memories. This year, when you are making your gift buying list and checking it twice, how about checking out your local businesses online and seeing what they have to offer. By supporting local businesses, you are in turn supporting your local economy, thus keeping business booming in your area. 2020 has been particularly hard for small business owners, especially if an "e-commerce presence" was not crossing their minds anytime soon before this pandemic. Why not do a quick Google search and find out what businesses you can support near you. Recently created websites such as ["Shop Local"](#) and ["Locally"](#) may help you with your research. Happy shopping!

3 Virtual volunteering.

This time of year, is all about bringing peace and joy into the world, and what better way than giving back to those who have been less fortunate? With Covid-19, you may think that your opportunity to volunteer has been swiped away, but with many charities' moving to virtual volunteering, your chance is not over. Check out [dosomething.org](#) to find out some [places to volunteer online](#). Or, if you are unable to volunteer this year, you can still donate to your charity of choice by researching online how to donate.



4 Online Christmas Party.

This time of year, is all about bringing peace and joy into the world, and what better way than giving back to those who have been less fortunate? With Covid-19, you may think that your opportunity to volunteer has been swiped away, but with many charities' moving to virtual volunteering, your chance is not over. Check out [dosomething.org](#) to find out some places to volunteer online. Or, if you are unable to volunteer this year, you can still donate to your charity of choice by researching online how to donate.

5 Create a shared Spotify Christmas playlist.

With the topic of family in mind, why not create a shared Christmas playlist? All you need to do is follow Spotify's collaborative playlist steps for either desktop or mobile and share the playlist link with all your loved ones. You can even make the Christmas playlist a theme! "Songs with the word snow in the lyrics" or "songs about reindeer" – you can also play the playlist during your online Christmas party!

There you have it, a few festive and effective tips that will hopefully help you all to keep the Christmas spirit alive this December. Enjoy, stay safe, and have a very Merry time!



Create a festive

Christmas Stocking



A festive, easy sewing project to add some Christmas cheer at home.



You will need:

- a non-elastic exciting Christmasy fabric (approx. 60 cm long)
- a white polar fleece fabric (approx. 50 x 15 cm)
- Soft fat layering fleece for adding puffiness to the Christmas stocking
- 25 cm of golden or silver ribbon
- Thread and a sewing machine or needle

1. Take your favorite sock and copy its shape to a white paper adding roughly 4 cm on each site. – This is the pattern of your future Christmas stocking!

Additionally you will need a 14 cm wide piece of the white polar fleece. The length depends on the widths of your white paper sock doubled (mine was 18cm x 2).



2. Next, you will need to cut out the sock shape 4 times out of your favorite Christmas fabric, twice out of the layering fleece, and the polar fleece part once. Be careful with the sock: cut it 2x on the right side and 2x on the left side (simply turn your paper template on its other side).



3. Pin together one right and one left sock part. To one pair, add the white layering fleece to each site.



4. Now sew the parts together using a simple straight stitch. If sewing by hand, you can use a running stitch.



5. Next, you will need to turn the sock with the layering fleece inside-out. Then stuff the thin sock on into the layered sock.



6. Flip the upper edges of your sock inside, so that the rim looks nice and neat. Then, hem the upper entry to your stocking.



7. Sew the white polar fleece together to form a circle. Then double layer this circle and pull it over your sock so that all rims lay on top of each other. Add a 10 cm piece of the ribbon to be able to hang your stock later. Sew along the rim once to merge all parts.



Finish up your amazing Christmas sock by flipping the white fleece upwards and adding the bow to the front.

Finally, fill it up with all the good stuff and surprise someone special for Christmas. □



Rebecca Eiermann is a consultant by day and enjoys sewing in her free time. She is based in Köln, Germany.

Doggie Gingerbread Treats

With schools closed, cozy weather, and the kids at home for extended amounts of time, you might be looking for a good Christmas activity to participate in as a family. If you're like this mama here, it's easy to overindulge in sugary treats and find yourself binge-watching too many Disney classics with the kids. So if you need a family Christmas activity that doesn't involve insulin spikes or screen-time and helps your children focus on others this holiday season, I have an activity for you!

Many kids long for a pet during the holiday season. Who doesn't want to snuggle up with a furry friend when the temperature drops? Chances are, you might not be in a place to adopt or foster a new pet this season. Even so, your kids can still do something nice for the animals who need it most by making dog treats for local animals in need. Your kids will learn how to pay it forward while still having fun in the kitchen and creating memories with the family -- what could be better?! Wrap these up in a festive tin after baking and you're good to go!

Materials:

- Festive silicone mold (We like hearts or gingerbread people)
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup quick-cook oats
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup applesauce
- ¼ cup of peanut butter (smooth or chunky)
- ¼ cup of coconut oil, melted and cooled
- Cooking spray

Directions (Makes 2 dozen):

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees.
2. Spray your silicone mold with cooking spray.
3. In a large bowl mix your dry ingredients.
4. Make a well in the center and with a wooden spoon or your hands, mix in your wet ingredients.
5. Spoon your mixture into your silicone mold, filling half-way. Smooth mixture down.
6. Bake for 20-25 minutes. Let cool & serve.

These pet treats should keep for 1-2 weeks in an airtight container in the fridge or for 3 months in a sealed freezer bag.

Recipe by Cynthia Walgenbach
Renewed Motherhood



Mushroom Wellington

Whenever I want to make something special for the holidays, this is a recipe that I always pull out. It makes a great vegetarian main for your Christmas feast that will even have the family carnivores taking seconds.

Directions :

1. Preheat your oven to 350F. While the oven is preheating, cook the minced mushrooms, onion, and garlic in a pan on medium-high heat. Add some salt and pepper, and continue cooking the mushrooms until most of their liquid has evaporated.
2. Next, add the herbs and the wine and continue cooking until the liquid has evaporated. Then, set aside.
3. Place your thinly sliced potatoes in a bowl with water to cover them. Then, microwave the potatoes for 10 minutes on medium power. This will help to partially cook the potatoes but be careful when you take the potatoes out of the microwave as they will be very hot.
4. Now, roll out your puff pastry. You will use one sheet for the bottom and one sheet to cover your filling. Make sure that you roll your top sheet bigger than your bottom sheet.
5. Place a layer of the sliced potatoes on the puff pastry. Make sure to leave a 1 inch (2 cm) space between the potatoes and edge. Now, you can start creating alternating layers of grated cheese, mushroom filling, and sliced potatoes.
6. After finishing your layers of filling, brush a beaten egg on the edges of the bottom pastry before placing the top puff pastry layer. Make sure to seal the edges. You can use any extra puff pastry as decorations or use a knife to make decorative scoring marks. Brush your entire wellington with the beaten egg before placing it in your oven for 45-60 minutes or until golden brown.

Ingredients (serves 6-8):

- 2 sheets of puff pastry
- 600g of mushrooms finely minced
- 1 small onion chopped
- 2 garlic cloves chopped
- 1 ½ tsp of thyme
- ½ tsp of rosemary
- 2/3 cup of red wine
- 1 large potato thinly sliced
- 175g of grated gruyere or parmesan cheese
- 1 beaten egg
- 1 tsp of oil
- Salt and pepper to taste



Recipe by Elizabeth Harris
[Egh Delights \(@eghdelights\)](#)

'Tis the Season

12 Facts of Christmas

Collected by Emer O' Shea



1 The 25th of December is never mentioned in the Bible. The date became intertwined with Christmas as it coincided with a Pagan Festival Saturnalia, honouring the God Saturn. Norsemen (Scandinavians) celebrated Yule from 21st December, winter solstice, rejoicing that the worst of winter was behind them, celebrating by burning logs that lasted up to 12 days.



2 Tree decorating is a tradition that came from the Ancient Egyptians and Romans who marked the Winter solstice with evergreens to remind them that spring and green would return.



3 St. Nikolas was a Christian bishop who gave away his inheritance to needy women rescued from servitude. His name was Sinter Klass in Dutch, later morphing into Santa Claus.



4 Coca Cola helped play a part in immortalising the jolly man in a red suit, with a 1932 ad by illustrator Haddon Sundblom. Sundblom used himself as a model!

5 Jingle Bells in Space! Astronauts Thomas P. Stafford and Wally Schirra were scheduled to re-enter Earth's atmosphere on December 16th, 1965 aboard Gemini 6 when they reported to Mission Control that they had sighted some sort of U.F.O. The U.F.O. was piloted by a man wearing a Red Suit as they played Jingle Bells in the background.



6 Hanging stocking by the fire was a tradition, said to come from the generosity of St. Nick who dropped gold down the chimney for a poor man who could not afford his daughters dowries.



7 Rudolph the Reindeer came from a department store in Chicago as a marketing idea in 1939. The department store used to give away free books to kids each Christmas, and Robert L. May, a catalog writer thought Rudolph would be a great character in one.



8 While not entirely synonymous with Christmas, Black Friday can be seen as a mark of the Christmas shopping period, signalling when retailers would move from being financially 'in the red' to being profitably the black.



9 Christmas playing cards given to POWs in German camps contained secret escape maps when moistened.

10 Oliver Cromwell considered the decorating, singing and celebrations of Christmas sinful, banning Christmas. In 1644, an Act of Parliament effectively banned the festival. In June 1647, the Long Parliament passed an ordinance confirming the abolition of the Feast of Christmas. Charles II later restored it.



11 Leaving Christmas cookies is another Nordic tradition where Odin had an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir. Kids would leave treats for Sleipnir, hoping that Odin would favour them with gifts in return.



12 Christmas Crackers were created by confectioner Tom Smith in 1847. Mimicking the wrapping of French bonbons, he placed toys and jewellery in packaging with twisted ends. Inspired by the crackling sound of logs on the fire, he came up with the cracking mechanism that created a 'pop' as the bonbon wrapping was broken.





Thank
You!

To everyone involved and our supporters. Toastee Mag wouldn't have happened without you.

#toasteemag

We made

this pandemic

our B*TCH!

Toastee Magazine | The Inagural Issue

Issue 1, December 2020