

The Pandemic Papers
Vol. 3

New Poems by
Bob Monahan

Dedicated to all y'all out there who
are doing tne damn thing you know
deep down you need to be doing.
I love and support you from the very
center of my being.

"Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air."

- Wendell Berry

"Keep walking,
towards the next beautiful thing
you will do."

- Grace Butcher

To Be of Use

The challenge for most of us lies in the endless search of what makes the soul strings vibrate

and sing with delight. With that in mind, this can of kidney beans on the shelf leaves me with

very few options. Chili comes to mind. My dad used to make three- or was it five- bean salad?

My body cringes as I recall too many childhood picnics where I stepped on bumble bees, surprising

us both, and someone ran to get baking soda while I watched the other kids play frisbee. It wasn't

without consequence to the bee, which I've since learned, can only sting once before its buzzing

grows ever more faint, eventually ceasing. As if the world gift wraps our lessons and hands them

to us, As if the setting sun casts shadows that reveal our innermost kid fears, like the lawn

ornaments in a palatial estate of subconscious delusion. I'm ready now. I accept the consequence

of maturity with a piercing cry as the barbed hooks of childhood are withdrawn from my fully

formed pectoral muscles. I want to be the baking soda applied to the bee sting, and in some super-

natural way, I want to revise the cosmic recipe of three-bean salad to include forgiveness of our

fathers for they only knew how to be as good as their fathers were to them. And the can of kidney

beans on all of our pantry shelves-- may it transmute the wisdom and the intention of my love for

you, sweet daughter of mine, so that you will keep it around. So that it may be of use to you.

December 17, 2020 - Duluth, MN



Every Day Now

Remind me again why we spend our lives paving paths to the places we work, the stores we know will have the brand of cereal we grew up with, the cousin's house with the two lion statues out front, and the mailbox that only really ever seems to contain pieces addressed to "current resident."

I've walked a mile in your shoes. I've seen the dilapidated signs hanging by a single screw. I've seen the Aspens twitterpating in a summer breeze. I've felt the place where your heel rubs against the exposed leather and causes you to think about a temporary fix or whether the drive thru spot on the avenue is still open for business, like what happens when all the shoe repair places close and all of our toes are blown open exposed?

Even if this Alberta Clipper rolls through today like it's supposed to, and ice and snow make a mockery of our post-solstice glow, the glimmer of hope we show no one, though it's well-known that the days grow longer, even as the cold finds a toe hold, emboldened by a downturn in the so-called collective soul quotient.

Every day now, I pray for the masses. I forgave my dad, mom, sister, brother, and even that dude that ~~k~~ whacked my books out my hands between classes. I simply let it go. It's up to the fates to decide now. It's gonna take a landslide, but I believe in the power of love from which we run from but can't hide. If we remember where we come from, there's still time. A flash in the pan we may be, but it takes a series of miracles for us to begin to see.

This isn't a desperate plea. It's a testament to the power of my own intrinsic ability to be me. You have it in you, too. You simply have to be still long enough to allow it to breathe. Spring seems like an eon away, but in actuality spring can be yours each and every single muthafuckin da

D^{12/28/20}
11:11 AM



Hazy Shade of What the Fuck

The window is made of ice. Only light comes through its translucence like rough skin the kind that's turned brittle from not enough love.

If you want to know, I named each teardrop this morning as they fell, birthed by a burst of real or imagined gratitude. If you're tracking give me a moment to remember the dream about the kids on the playground. One of them may have been you.

It's truly not enough to say it. You have to feel it and to feel requires swift strokes of an imagination flickering flame of untamed some may say reclaimed- youth, but explain to me how words can feel shame, when they're the truth.

Each word has purpose, has a duty to illuminate the others, has a sibling they don't agree with, like we each have an ancient trunk from a grandparent we never met, filled with tools we haven't begun to know how to use...yet.

Winter is the season I'd least like to die in, for obvious reasons. We may do our best work in wool socks and long johns up here where the perscriptions are myriad and the ice cube tray is unironically always empty. We may classify ourselves as robust, resilient even, and some- not all- will make it out alive.

I'm asking you to read between the lines here. There's more tea in this cup than in all of red China. We stroll through our shopping malls and discount stores to a soundtrack of human lack, catterwalling lit'luns, and wonder why we ate the fruit and can't go back. We stuff ourselves with antidotes, kryptonite diets filled with all those indigestible micro- fuckin toxic waste chunks- I dunno. Bad shit, okay.

Just know that you are loved by someone. Please just know that you are worth more than you have ever given yourself credit for. That you are alive and that is fucking sacred.

12/29/20 - Duluth, MN

For you, Teacher

This one's for you, laced with dreams half-forgotten and cups half-drunk the brownish remnants tell a story of a morning heavy laden with prize-winning presence and the smell of homemade incense.

Chills is what you gave me. Not just that, but a cooling sensation in my belly and ticles in my extremities like maybe I was dying.

Last night in the sauna, there was a young man who may or may not have killed three of his best friends in a car wreck a couple months back. His day in court is today. His only crime, as the sole survivor, is not wearing a seatbelt.

These trials we attend, each and every one of us, when we are brought to justice by our own unwill, must plead the 5th if nothing else or face harder consequences, contempt, at least. Sentencing can be a delicate subject, especially when the punishment fits the crime. I don't think a case can be made for hard time, though each of us must spend a lifetime ~~xxxxxx~~ inside the walls of our own minds.

That's why we must thank our teachers for the lessons they do their very best to invest in us. As students, what testaments we are to the steps necessary to transcend. What gifts we are to the institutions we inhabit. They would not exist without our minds ~~xx~~ ability to persist. It's not enough to subsist on, that's why we must raise our fists and ~~gxx~~ remember you have to give shits to get shits, if you get my drift, son.

Education is a gift, but it's judgement is swift. I love you. That's why I'm telling you all this. Don't be afraid to kiss life on the lips, and when it hands you a bottle of brown liquid, don't chug it, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ sip ~~xx~~ that shit.

12/5/21
Duluth, MN

Deep In the Medicine

Imagine, an army of a ^{hundred} thousand yogis,
each wielding a powerfood smoothie in one hand
and a smoldering stick of palo santo in the other

Now imagine yourself at the castle gate
ready to greet them, to meet their demands,
to unite the clans and collectively surrender
under a white buffalo moon and stars so abundant
their arrival to Earth imminent- undeniable-
like the expanse moving toward ecstasy inside
your heartspace.

All eyes on Jupiter.

All hands clasped in one another.

Let's smooth out the edges of this orbital
power sphere as the light begins to refract,
playing tricks on the mind's eye, reflecting
back towards heaven, obliterating the night sky.

Now let's drop in with a few breaths.

In through the nose, out through the mouth.

IN through the nose, out through the mouth.

Now imagine we aren't here.

Eyes closed. No peeking.

Imagine we've merged with the cosmos, melded
with the astral body. Just like that.

poof

And just for fun let's pretend that we can see
back to a few minutes from now.

What's changed?

I hear there's no such thing as FOMO

in the afterlife. What is life without you?

What is left to ponder when all the questions
have been answered?

Where are you now?

Do you hear that dog barking its own name?

Do you feel the sensation of light on your
eyelids? Is there a ~~name~~ word that describes
nothingness? When you are deep in the medicine
there is only the medicine. Let us be the medicine
e...together.

1/6/21

Duluth, MN

Blank Page

It's loaded question.
Indigestion like a fully loaded freight train.
I know if I stop running away, turn around
and face it full frontal lobe style.
Like a pot cookie that dropped you into third
going 55. What in the nature of this medicine
brings me as a cat drags a fresh kill to its
owner as a token of appreciation to a shadowy
patch in my path where I feel the stock market
is the most geeked out casino ever, and you turn
around and there is a french couple being them-
selves, and I wish I was high.

They say what you seek is ctually seeking you.
They also say if you're lost you should stay
in the same place, so the ones seeking you will
find you, but what if you are the one seeking
and you get lost? Then we are all staying put,
suspended in an obscure form of japanese airline
elevator music.

What is the use of even getting high any more?
She's using you ya know?
For her own survival.

Yeah, but you can't fault her for that.
I don't know about you, but she's usually
a woman to me, a guiding light for the pie-eyed,
and never a bridesmaid, always a bride.

It's going to take an extremely boppin bassline
to slap me out of the fake ass La Croix malaise
this good & gather get together feels artificial
but only by the sheer numbers of straight up
imposters. Imperscnators, impoverished by an
ill-equipped--

Or am I?

Anything I say I am?

I plead the fifth dimension.

I've searched for you among the moons of jupiter
Calling out to all the Cooper troopers in the
galaxy beyond what we ever imagined space travel
could be. It's still hard to believe we are
even here sometimes. Fuck, I digress.

I've searched for you because I know
you're seeking me. too.

The Ritual is Everything

We make love.
We dance.
We pray.
We give thanks.
We breathe.
We find stillness.
We listen in silence.
We drive home with a belly full of wine.
The ritual becomes our accountability
to process, to reverence, to the sacred,
the divine, the lesson, the gift.

We aren't as far from God as we think.
The invocation begins with belief in ritual.
Setting aside distraction, finding Self
in the middle, in the center of the eye of God.
Can you breathe in source? Yes.
Can you breathe out fear, doubt, stress?
Yes you can.

What happens when you forget about all that
you know as reality? Disappear into the loving
nothingness of the void between your eyes
for a moment. Pretend you aren't born yet.
Let the senses go numb. Breathe in pure ecstasy,
the source of pure beingness. Exhale your old
thoughts, patterns, beliefs. They no longer
serve you.

We think we know so much, but as we learn to
unthink, we allow life's greatest lessons in.

We sing.
We play.
We dream.
We journey.
We stretch.
We kiss.
We have gratitude.
We breathe into the parts of ourselves
that have been starved of love for so long.
We renew.
We are reborn again,
and again, and again.

Clearing the Way

We open the door of possibility when we sit surrounded by stillness. We close it when we embrace the noise inside the void. Keeping simplicity close at hand, it becomes a gateway for exploring new lands. This is why they say keep your friends close, their judgements at a safe distance. Also why we have two jars; one for swaers and the other for each time you hear the neighbor scream themself awake in the night.

A lot of people think it's enough to simply exist. Sure, acid rain happens. Cancer grows in the throat of the news media, while women and children mysteriously disappear, and we are transfixed by our fascination with star projectors and what he said she said, who made a cameo on the show with the people who play people whose lives are much more interesting than ours.

I'm sorry and I'm not. I didn't ask to be this observer. The people across the hall didn't win a cosmic lottery ticket and become scrappers like some post-apocalyptic peasant class needed ~~the~~ new life breathed into it. Point is we don't sit around wondering what to do, but maybe there's something to it. Making space for the universe to intervene. Maybe I sound like a ground-down, new age, wisdom tooth slated for extraction. A pundit version of Daffy Duck, craving a dose of discrete human interaction.

Perhaps sitting still is the new gaining traction and the way inward is like students on a school bus in their mini versions of themselves, with thoughts so trivial yet too profound for anyone lost in the societal sauce to recognize as such. What if the way in, back to basics, retracing steps, debasing foundational beliefs, retracting behavioral patterns. What if we let our imaginations go rogue? That to me seems like it would do it. Who here feels like they have the courage to go through with it?

1/12/21
Duluth, MN

Spilled the Tea

They said it'd take two miracles happening at the same time to create this kind of love that cascades out of both cups sort of like when water hits a concave surface a bowl or a spoon, it fountains out. That's what this love is like, anyway.

There seem to be complications. How often is it straight-forward or singular in its summation when the thinking world gets its shot at it. Not saying this love doesn't deserve its own TV mini-series or won't when it's all said and done. Geography sure does know how to play its part well. Personally, bring on what nightmarish hell you've conjured up. That's the best you can do?

She's merely a three and a half hour flight away, and don't you dare deny me this commercial break I've fought so hard for. Don't strip me of my powers I've lived thus far, dreamt of, spent time in the hole for, risked life and limb to get through a Tuesday afternoon, been down this road like a Roadrunner cartoon, and now that it finds me attending to its nuanced new wave new heart, fresh start, flesh and bone. Come soon and come alone.

Now that I'm giving it attention, divided but no less loving intention, not to mention, I'm in the mood for an ascension. Where's the mind end and the heart begin? We about to start this intervention. Okay, let's drop the pretention.

Healing comes in many forms, some of which aren't immediately recognizable. Some come with a side of subconscious whiplash, others with a shattered martini glass. Heaven help us when our shadows come out to play. I immediately think of last summer, and not with you, but hey...touché. I'll show you my playbook if you show me yours. As if love isn't aware that you're scared, as if it warns you before kicking open every door. That's the love that I know, the one that is footloose and fancy free. The one that spills all the tea. The one that trying to bring you to me.

Worth It

I challenge you to calculate your worth. Don't forget to factor in every experience you've had since birth. It all counts. Extra points for painful- let's call them "character-building" experiences. Those are the most enriching. Heart ache, heartbreak, loss of any kind, depression, sickness, abuse, and failure. These all add to your total, some more substantially than others, but trust me, if someone was like "How much do you charge per hour to keep living," now, imagine this: if you were to get paid for maintaining some semblance of a "life" how much would you charge? Suicide attempts add like a buck and change, per attempt. If your dog got hit by a Hummer, that's 70 cents, 85 if you saw it. Parents fight, \$.15, divorce- parents 35 cents, you personally 45. Now you see? Happy ass muthafuckas want to be here. They don't need to get paid for shit. That's cool cuz me and my friends gonna need to get real paid if you want to keep us around. We're the ones out here keeping it real though. We earned it, so you can pay us and we will help you when you need it, cuz we've been through it. Tax the happy. They won't care. They don't give a fuck about who they gotta pay, as long as they happy, even though that's annoying and we all know it. Also, know your worth when it comes to dating. Don't date anyone who isn't on or above your metaphysical pay scale. They don't want your money, they want your coping mechanisms. Fuck that. Get away from those folks. Enough said. So, you're probably wondering what a good base rate is, and don't assume that just because you dropped your latte on the sidewalk, you deserve a raise. The work experience is done on the inside collected over lifetimes; many traumas and many subsequent deaths to quell the violence, sometimes we breathe ~~and~~ in and die, and are reborn on the exhale. Sometimes you fall in a dream and don't wake up until someone catches you in real life a month later. Life can be really fucking lonely sometimes. It can swipe at your ankles from under the bed. It can karate kick you in the face or worse. And at the end of the day, if it isn't obvious the best possible way is pure love from within.

Easy to Complain

It's easy to complain, so easy that we have to make up new catagories of things to complain about even.

Coffee or shower not hot enough. Blankets too warm, had to throw them off in the night. Wayy too many people at the spot, who the fuck is this dude I've never seen him before.

Lights too bright, music not loud enough. Can I get some more ice? This picture won't hang straig and neither do you, shoulda had a V8, you're too silly, I want someone serious. You're not smart enough, your taste in music sucks.

The snow is too wet. My back hurts from bending over to pick up your shit. The kids are ruining the vibe. Thye grow up so fast, yeah but not fast enough. Why can't you train them to be more civilized? They're little savages running around with no reverence for a gaddamn thing.

I can't get high any more. Your uncle fought in Vietnam and now he's dead from lung cancer. There not even a spec of irony in that. Why is this my life? It's like we were all born into damnation and churches are like these shrines to the pain that we will never pray away. Suicide once scunde assholish, but I get it now. There's power in sel determination.

These windows are drafty. I have a drinking problem. She never seems to see me, but she knows I'm here. Maybe it's cuz I'm with these dudes with no future. There's such an echo in here. If only we could take our masks off. I'm done drinking. Fuck it.

Thank you for seeing the good in me. Thank you for not judging me. Thank you for loving me for who I am. We need more people like you in this world. We need more love in the world. We need to learn to love ourselves more. We can change the world by loving more. Thank you for listening to me. I feel loved. When I feel loved, I feel like

You Come to Realize

You come to realize after many years in the friend business that there are many types of friends and not all of them are keepers, but they are pretty much all worth having.

They're like experiences in this way. Some of the experiences you have are tough. They teach you things you didn't necessarily want to learn about yourself or the kind of world we live in, but you now have that knowledge and you are certainly better for it.

I once had a friend who helped me wriggle out of a fucked up relationship with a woman who felt I was completely out of my mind on drugs and booze- which I was, but it was the presence of this friend that put her over the top. Even friends who you cut out because they are simply too volatile can help you out in their own weird way.

Lately, I have become friends with many women. There's this dance early on where we're sizing each other up, deciding whether we want to be friends or if there's any romantic implications to be concerned with. So far, it seems there are not, which is smart cuz getting to know someone before you try to bring them to meet the more-protected parts of yourself seems to coincide w/ my own intuitive sense in this case.

So, anyway. it's still tough with them sometimes. Yeah, ok, I get it. We need to be cautious, but we've basically sorted out the logistics. Geography makes that stuff easier in many respects. But there's still some serious walls that have to be torn down or maybe deconstructed, brick by brick. And maybe they're more like monuments to certain tyrannical reigns of the past. Nevertheless, it's been difficult to communicate on the level I'd like to, and I think toppling these testaments to certain herstorical trauma would be a marked improvement in things, overall, but maybe I'm just being an insensitive dick face.

Cat Daddy

I needed this today.
Love from you and you alone seemed to save me,
it definitely gave me the will to go on.
Feeling you now from 1,600 miles away,
a sense that you are in these words,
carried by the Santa Ana winds to this land
of untenable cold, your soothing sweetness
a slave for my impenetrable soul.
That you can do for me as your beauty muses
without confusing the many uses of the word
"dueces" which can mean two-fold, the kind of
beauty I haven't seen since I first saw fool's
gold and was like "daaamn, that shit is too cold,
but see you're real and that makes me see double.
There's a jazz song in my soul and it makes me
feel out of control in the best sense. I've down-
graded the wall around my heart to a fence.
No one's gotten this close to me in a minute.
I bet you wish you knew who it was, and I'm sure
you have your hunches, but I'm telling you,
this thing got me breathing heavy, mi corazon,
beating loudly, and the burning in my brain says
that someday, I'll be able to announce to y'all
proudly, she mine, and I'm hers.
Let's do this twin flame thing, universe.
My queen, it's for you, this first of many,
Odes to us, through me, as god as my witness,
may you see me, hear this, feel it deep in your
being; my love and its eternal limitlessness.

For my Queen

1/27/21
Duluth, MN

No Amount of Preparation

It was perfect.

In all of its terrifyingness and gut-wrenching what-the-fuck-do-I-do-nowness, it was a glowing orb of absolute surrender.

After all, it could have been otherwise.

The stage was set.

Candles and incense, tunes and vibes to make even a moderate hippy drool at what we've come to define as "cool," we ready, we hungry, we mad, let's fucking do this, fam.

I admit, I wasn't nervous enough.

Anxious to drop in, to work my magick, to sit and watch over my flock, and maybe allow myself to drift off for a moment, but no, stay with it, medicine man. Your job is to keep it real.

So, I did.

The first sign we were losing him came and I knew I knew and I realized it was far too late to save him, so I saved myself.

It was supposed to be so simple, so far out, fantastical. It was 26th rodeo by conservative estimate. No amount of preparation prepares you for your 27th. I get that.

Each rodeo is your first rodeo.

I get that now.

We lost him for two and a half hours down the rabbit hole of subconsciousness.

We went to our own corners of wicked dark contemplation. We reviewed our strategies, compared notes, drew straws, and puffed a lot of tobacco. We held a vigil for our man's sanity. When he came back, shell shocked, ashamed, shattered stained-glass, impostered, and piss-soaked, all we could do was love him.

Grateful to be alive, and I'll never forget what he asked me: "What drives you, man? What fuels your passion?" Without hesitation, I answered: "Love. Deeper and deeper states of love."

We ate breakfast the next morning in reverence of something I'm not sure any of us could name, but if I had to name it, I'd say it's surrender. Life is ceremony, the rest is just integration.

1/29/21

Duluth, MN



With Intent

Deep. Deeper.
Deeper still.
Satisfaction.
Silent, serious.
Luxe. Luxurious.
Steady. Curious.
Linear. Lunar.
Faster. Sooner.
Slower. Smoother.
Soothing. Truth hurts.
Moving through it.
Haunted. Hunted. Daunted.
We aren't used to it.
Fists up. First~~s~~ transmute it.
Teacher teach me. I'm new to this.
Fly me to the moon. Fuck.
Too soon.
With intent this time.
The physiology of desire.
We cast fat, black shadows.
We shoot. We reload. We misfire.
This choir, discordant, sixty voices
in a forest fire. Dive deep.
Don't you dare go back to sleep.
One in a lifetime, that's how many
hearts you get. One knight. One squire.
So many souls~~s~~ are wrapped in razor wire.
Circumstances. You take your chances.
Satisfaction is the execution of-
more like the resolution of-
revolution of love-
let's let ourselves be transmutations
of limitless, precipitous, omnipotent,
devotional, all of the world's radiance,
sinking into our cells, emotional,
let's let ourselves fucking go.
Stop being afraid and let love in...
and out. Give and receive,
as we breathe in and out.
In. And out.
Deeper and deeper.
Deeper still.
Now let it all go.

1/30/21
Duluth, MN

About the Type of Woman

I'm not looking. That's what most folks don't know about me. I seem like I would be, but it's ruse meant to amuse myself, mostly. Not to confuse the issue of what I wouldn't do for a muse, but that's all of yous. If I sat around daydreaming about my type of woman or how my life is nice but could use more wife, doesn't matter how you slice, I'm a bleedin' bachelor, and it's fine for now. Enjoy it while it lasts is good, Don't be too eager to come out of the woods. Let your hair grow long, the beard come in full. The one you want isn't concerned. Love is made, not earned. Loosely described, my love is... My love doesn't...it can't be summed up in words. I could try, but it feels absurd. I'm talented and love is abound and abundant. That is good enough for now. Too often we paint these pictures that don't do us justice. Us, yes us, not just us, but the us that I trust is bubbling up from somewhere deep. The smell of water on dust. You guys go on ahead, I'll catch up. A man doesn't wait, but for you, I will. No, really, I read it in a book once, but it can't tell me about how I will know it's you by the look on your face. Not that I'm welcoming in my queen or anything. I will know you by your gaze, and you, mine. The planets engaged, the stars and our spirits fully aligned. We will know. And in this knowing, there is no type. There is no form or phase or physicality needed to ignite. No fight or flight. There is only twinkling blue light, as our beings intertwine in infinite divine understanding of ever-loving, omniscient, celestial ~~un~~ unicity.

~~And that, my friends, is about the type of woman I'm interested in. I'd like to open up the floor for questions if there are any. Thanks everyone for showing up.~~

2/4/21
Duluth, MN

To Pause

To take a moment
to recognize that you
are not alone.

To feel the fullness
like the bass note
of a drum beat.

To look from the third
eye inward as an
observer.

To feel the gentle
warmth of a candle
in its oneness.

To let go of even
the notion that there
is time or space.

To really know
that there is a thing
called nothingness.

To taste the air
as it passes by your
tongue on its way
to your lungs as if
by a symphony of tiny
violins you get to
experience what it feels
like to be present
in a moment when
everything else
churns with the mightx
of the entire universe
crying out for one
single sip of stillness.

To pause for a moment
at the top of your breath
is to hold ~~xxxx~~ everything
in the palm of your hand
and not blow it all away.

2/9/21
Duluth, MN

Find me in the matrix:

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***all proceeds will be reinvested in the future
of humanity as a whole. It needs it. Thanku.**