

The Pandemic Papers

new poems

by

Bob Monahan

what,
is going?
on w/
this
s c c i a l
d i s t a n c e
thing?

sincerely,
somebody close to you

- PRO.
April 1, 2020

Weather the Storm

Hope you like me enough
to want to weather the storm with me.

Matter of fact, I hope you like yourself
sufficiently enough to be able to weather
the storm. What do I mean? What do you mean
what do I mean? We're in this for the long
haul is what I mean. They say it could be
another month or two before it will be safe
to leave the house. Three before things will
return to normal. What is normal? What is
normal, youre asking me?

April 3, 2020
Iron River, WI

I Want, Therefore I am Quarantined
Surely it stands to reason that alone isn't
truly alone, since we're all in this together,
right? That's rhetorical, I suppose. So, yeah
WE are going to get through this, and I'll see
you at the bar where- as it turns out- I felt
at home. Or the coffee shop where I'd sit for
hours because I couldn't make coffee at home
before all this changed everything forever.

Brought us together like we never dreamed any-
thing could. Now look at us, we are truly swimming
in the same petri dish.

April 5, 2020
Iron River, WI

I Keep You Around

I keep you around in case
of what I cannot say with ~~certainly~~ assurity
You're like an insurance policy
that matures or ages with the uncertainty
of life yet lived. Surely, by now,
you might wonder why you're in my cellar,
becoming the bottle or jar filled with
the stuff of mid-winter wonder.

Alas, go back to sleep, I think to you
from a dream filled with birdsongs and
budding birch and balsams. I keep you around
because you remind me to pause and breathe
deeply, knowing that the best is yet unknown.

April 6, 2020
Iron River, WI

Two Weeks Ago

Two weeks ago it was a sheet
of pure white ice- and thick

at least six maybe eight inches.

I found a weak spot next to the dock

and threw a cinder block into it with
all the might raised above my head having

practiced such exercises as a child, it felt
so natural, and it made a hole big enough

to give me hope.

April 8, 2020

Iron River, WI

These Hours

These hours sure pass slowly out here among
the birds and squirrels, but there is hope

in the hints Spring drops, and really if the clock
in the cabin stops, what becomes of the hour

as a unit of measuring time? You'll have to count
cricket chirps or squint down the sun with your

pinky pressed to the horizon line just to know
the general vicinity of the hour of the day.

And don't you dare take a nap. You could wake
up when it's dark out and be all manner of

confused. Then what would you do with your
precious sense of time?

April 10, 2020
Iron River, WI

Ode to Flame

First, paper, but just enough you don't want the blaze to catch too quickly. Then, tiny twigs

to set it all in motion. They may protest, but they are the perfect ambassadors to the sticks

which must be short about the ~~width~~^{size} of a pencil and some closer to a drum stick, ~~xxfew~~ and not

the kind you're thinking, the kind you actually drum with. Then, you grab a pair of logs bigger

than your forearm or so and ~~put~~ flank the whole pile with them. Once they are in place, you stack

a couple more smallerish logs across the pile, like a split highway bridge that is about to burn

in a serious fire. Then you catch that paper with the lit tip of a match and watch as the whole mes

goes up in flames.

April 11, 2020
Iron River, WI

Don't Leave Me Here

Don't leave me here in all of my splendor. There is always wood to be chopped or a chipmunk to chase out of the garage. There's a chill in the air and it won't stop, the buds aren't pleased and the trees are sneezing. Don't leave me here where there's no bathroom to clean, the lake is a pristine dream evry morning the sun shines in the windows and I know it's time to make tea and read and write and reflect on the noises in the night. Just don't leave me here where the wind blows and the birds sing and the water is pure, the night sky is so full of stars you couldn't possibly see them all in a lifetime. If you leave me here, I'll be alone with the coyote yips and the woodsmoke and I'll miss you, but only when I'm in bed listening, shivering just a little when the rain rattles the roof and the fire's long gone out. Then, I will wish that you hadn't left me here.

April 19, 2020
Iron River, WI

Two Weeks

It seems two weeks applies to almost everything. Two weeks to live, to finish your assignment, to wait for a package from Istanbul, to move out of here, to see buds on the trees, for the test results, before your flight, and so on... Two weeks is about how long it takes to get bored of something, to want just a little twist on it, something to spice things up. Two weeks might ever be pushing it for some things like oatmeal or a slide at a playground. Two weeks in and even the baseball season seems a little stale. I once lived in a teepee and right around that two week point, we cracked and hopped in the whip and drove straight to Dairy Queen. Best cookie dough Blizzar I ever had, ~~as you can imagine.~~

April 21, 2020
Iron River, WI

Poem For Sitting There

Sometimes you put your head down on your crossed arms on the desk and wonder if you have what it takes like is it even worth it this poet's game the one you've been playing for over half your sweet little miserable joy-filled existence. You wish you were more awake maybe even wired on some too fucking strong coffee you gotta spoon out and chew on. Maybe it's fucking Saturday morning and you harken back to when cartoons actually meant something. You always look out the window and think about friends you should get in touch with and all the ex-lovers whom you definitely shouldn't. You see a vole run through the boggy brambles and think, "Now that little bastard has it made," and how you should write a nature poem, why all this shit about your existentialist ennui when your lizard brain is starved and writhing around having not been fed its usual diet of cheeseburgers and cocaine and all that other shit that causes night terrors: that is when you need to pen one about the lush green vibrance of moss in morning sunshine and stop thinking about the ways you could be killed before you get one last shot at a spontaneous trip to Florence after a night of fucking a pair of the most gorgeous twin sisters you've ever- and will ever- lay ~~any~~ eyes on.

April 25, 2020
Iron River, MN

What Sadness

What sadness often seems to ~~und~~disclose when it leaves the screen door hanging by a hinge, is why it came to visit at all. It was never invited over for teax and crumpets. It wasn't rumored to even be in town. And the crying, all the salty tears on the pillow, the sensation of them, with their pointless drops finding their way down as raindrops on a continental divide. The answer to why one is crying is easy, but to why one is sad, how can it even be known fully? We cry when we fall down and skin a knee and we cry when ~~t~~ the movie credits roll, and it is all a welcome release. Today, I think I'm sad because I'm losing touch with what made me happy up until now. I tried to think about it and it crushed me beneath its unknowing. That's why the sadness came a'knocking. The sadness came to help me with the pain, like an infestation in the walls, the tears are like traps for pain. You might not get rid of it all. In fact, it'll always be there in some form, but at least its incessant scratching won't keep you up at night- at least for a while.

April 26, 2020
Iron River, WI

The One

If there was a One then one would expect there'd be a two, and if a two, then surely a three, and so on and so fourth. But because it seems there is no One for me then it stands to reason that there is no two and no three either, thus there is no We unless it's royal and byond that point what's left to boil down, don't frown upon my silly theory, I'm half-awake and outside is cold and dreary. This morning precludes whatever's left, of the month we shared, lovely tho bereft of what was shiny, somewhat fresh, tho far from new, something hidden beneath one's breast, something to be more so than do, something muttered beneath one's breath, could it be honest yes, but could it be true? The One who finds themselves looking too long in the mirror, the other searching for themself in words , and when the time is up neither will have found the other because nature has a way of knowing what cards are hid and which are showing, and these Ones happen to be different flowers with very different leaves, scents, and special powers. It's perfect timing that it's Spring because who knows what summer will bring. The truth will all be known quite soon, and all the flowers will be in bloom. There won't be One there'll be a thousand with summer breezes to arouse them all, then, with a shift of wind it will be fall.

April 27, 2020
Iron River, WI

April 30, 2020
Iron River, WI

When No One's Around

I like when no one's around. You never have to wonder what that noise you just heard downstairs

was. Sure, it could be a mouse. It could be a raccoon for all I care. If I hear the coffee

grinder or a stifled sneeze I'm going stress out because I didn't have anyone over last night.

I never have anyone spend the night. Too disruptive, in general. I live alone for a reason.

I really like it best when no one's around. I mean sure, come over lets chat over beer or wine

on the porch. It's summer and the kids are out biking around and being kids in the summer eve-

ning. The air is that gauzy texture and I like your company, mostly that I don't have to stop

to explain what a word means, and you know everything turned to shit in the early millenium

or maybe before that, but I don't have to debate a whole lot with you, and you don't drink too

much or get weird, and you go home at a reasonable hour. Still, in the morning when I'm up walking

the dirty floors and feeling my age and avoiding mirrors in that way, I want the place to myself

goddamit. If I smell toast or some such nonsense I'm going to get the baseball bat from my behind

my bedroom door and head downstairs and by god it better be a mouse and a raccoon sitting there

having tea and toast in the breakfast nook or I'm swear something unhappy would go down. This

is mostly to say if I don't ask you to stay over it's for your own safety.

The Somber

Ego driven assholes they congregate
moving westward along Alameda B. vd.

We are stolen scripts away from a century
of unexplained murder and material wealth

accumulation does any of this sound familiar?
She recoils into her star pose and the silence

fills in the gaps. It was ours all along check
the star log and then do something that scares

you. That's just what they'll do. That's why
I'm awake and you're awake and the whole tribe

waits for the call to arms, loving arms, the arms
your mother intended. strong arms, bold arms,

arms of a loving god

5/3/20
Duluth, MN

I'm Sorry, But I'm Not

Just a brief check-in is all this brother was asking for. In a pinch, but we had him all the while. My mother it seems has come to teach me another lesson in self-awareness.

I am blind to it. I am a witness drawn too close to the light, a suspect drifting from the truth. I'm a marigold and you are my savior wrapped in sparkly garments and dressed in the glory of her eminence the darling of our canoe voyage. We have only read of her trials, but for a son or a daughter to have empathy for their parents, should a paint can fall off the shelf and splatter the nuance we chased each other around the schoolyard to attain.

I am the King, Warrior, Magician, Lover and we seek to heal you from the past that ails you. We use a special typeset to conjure you it's with a delicate almost interference that we depart from you. Someone should give me this in a text some day. Someday we will dine on the fruits of our passions. These kicks smarter than words and riddled with stops to your conversations tonight. The intrinsic value of the Akashic and the ancient. You have to know the word. You are the word. Get over yourself. The man is inside sleeping. Do not attempt to wake him. You are the teacher and the student. This is how it was and will be.

July 18, 2020
Duluth, MN

Before Work

Ah, you know how it goes, but does my neighbor, kept alive by a series of bad mistakes, the kind you learn absolutely nothing from? He (or she) is on that highest tightrope, the one with sure death. They can smell their own fear up there. Before work, I make it a point to bang out a poem about someone who has a harder job than I do. This one's clearly dedicated to you, neighbor.

The next one will be for the woman who called me 23 minutes ago for a ride. When I saw the missed call I thought, "We're not those kinds of friends, woman." I don't know where she got the idea that I give rides to people I used to sleep with during the phase of my life that now sits supremely in the self-destructive realm, a real humdinger of a time. If you can relate, good for you, you once sipped on a cocktail of self-loathing and regret as I once did.

I can sense my neighbor wondering if this sound is an actual typewriter or what the hell is going on, and my neighborly-ness kicks in telling me to go to fucking work, I got way more out of this poem than I ever imagined when I started it. Maybe I'll slip it under his/her door. Maybe I'll just go to work like a normal human being.

July 18, 2020
Duluth, MN

How it Comes For You

We don't make a lot of choices any more. Our choices make us, though. The chemical impulses compell, even direct, and when they come on, they come on strong. They pour gin into a glass you filled with ice moments earlier. They drove you to the store to buy limes, too. They put up that hideous fucking billboard on the freeway that claims their onion rings are the best in the Northland. They're definitely not. The melange of mind-numbing messages make sloppy love to your frontal lobe. It's all lube. They want you to enjoy the experince you're having in their adult playground. I know. I helped program the machine for awhile until I started to see its inner workings. They don't even disappear us any more. They shcould, We've seen the eye of the Beholder. It's too strong, the urge to consume its power. The darkness envelopes us. It talks to us in our sleep, calling us by name, entreating us to feast in our honor. That's why it's winning the race to see our own faces in the mirror. We are the mirrors. That's why it cuts the limes into wedges and opens the tonic and stirs the drink with so much satisfaction. With a sense of accomplishment.

August 3, 2020
Point o' Pines

If I Had to Choose

and

I'd rather have the truth beaten out of me
than tell a lie to someone I love just because

I was afraid that they wouldn't love me back
if they were to know said very inconvenient truth.

I think we can all agree that there's at least
a subtle difference between truth and fact

and if you're someone who shakes their head upon
★ hearing what sounds like actual shit being

extruded from a bull's posterior, then go ahead
and furror your brow and frown while you're at it

because eventually this will all make sense.
Maybe not to you, but listen, everyone else:

a truth is something that you can hold self-
evidently and a fact is something that has been

proven, though if left unchecked, can cause ★
a mass amount of people to believe something

that is in fact false. Now, The Truth is something
that can be ccontested and debated, but will never

change. It is what it is and will never be other-
wise. And that is what has me wheelchair-bound

and gagged, wishing I could go back and do what
I knew was right all along. The Truth will set

you free if you listen to it. If you don't, it'll
shatter your pelvis and crack your spine in three

places. It'll show you what you never wanted to
see: your own face in the mirror.

August 3, 2020
Point 6' Pines

I have wept, yet I haven't wept today yet

I used to feel bad for those scorned mothers who gave it all up for their spawn- and I mean all of it. The boys, the parties, the recognition, the chance to have it all; only to be left in the wake of others who never changed a diaper, never even scrubbed out a bathtub. And then to be hated by the very ones they gave it all up for, the ones they made every sacrifice under the sun to feed and clothe, the ones ~~she~~ held close when the wind thrashed the siding and spattered the windows with angry rain. Maybe she drove them away. Maybe it was all her heart could stand once the last sock found its way out from behind the dryer. The swing in the yard swayed lackadassically in an early autumnal breeze. The clock in the kitchen ticked and there was no talking. Even the neighborhood had taken on a certain frequency of hum that was not present prior to Sunday. It was more than odd she thought. It was as if they were never here. She peeked into the room of the oldest and quickly recoiled at the smell. They've been here, but they are gone now. She went to the hall closet and ~~PM~~ pulled out her guitar, sat down in the center of the livingroom and tuned that baby up. This moment was entirely hers. As she began to play, tears began to trickle out of the corners of her eyes. She played on and more tears, as if each tear duct was attuned to the chords. It was easily the saddest song anyone has ever played.

September 17, 2020

Awaiting the Perfect Cardiological Rhythm

In its waning, autumn fulfills its purpose in perfect patchwork quilt days punctuated by swirling clouds, sun popping out, woodsmoke, and raptors up along the ridge. Thousands of them in case a few dozen disappoint the doctor and his viewing party replete with Cote du Rhone and finger sandwiches. Something snaps loose from the binoculars, but no one can tell what it was for. Perhaps it fell from the sky a librarian chimes in when they have all but given up. She squints as her gaze meets a pair of American Kestrels down along the tree line, closing in on them. Forever the pessimist, her restless heart filled with regressions and undressed wounds, locked in on these two raptors, her eyes shifting as if she is admitting to killing the last living thing she was given, driven by a sub-civilian urge to ~~go~~ return to his reptilian skinny jeans and a million little victims each hidden beneath her veil of mysticism. There they were, infantile and driven by an intrinsic system of wind, wings, the power of something so beyond words, beyond migratory patterns, and she hadn't meant for this to happen here. The doctor pulled out a tiny comb and ran it through his beard. The shrill cry of a red-tail rose above the din.

September 18, 2020
Duluth, MN

Find me in the matrix:

@bomopoems on IG and Venmo*

*all proceeds will be reinvested in the future of humanity as a whole. Thank you!