



Diamonds in the Rough
A Literary Magazine

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Editor: Dr. Melissa Knox-Raab

Our Summer 2021 issue of *Diamonds in the Rough* provides pragmatic solutions. Advice about how to write your first song in the key of C Major, insights into sexism in politics, the advantages and disadvantages of unusual upbringings, reasons to listen to music, what menstruation means to the uterus, a wonderful recipe revealed by a less than wonderful relative, and an invitation to enjoy Anglophone Studies and Philosophy are among our topics. We offer thrills, too, in the form of an action-packed suspense story. Poetry and stunning art round out this issue.

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Essays

Why One Should Wear A Mask

By Neele Völker

Covid numbers are at an all-time low these days and the public is almost back to its regular schedule and lifestyle. This should mean that people are trying everything to keep their newly regained freedom, including wearing medical masks correctly. But especially in the last couple of weeks people act like the pandemic is over. They run their errands without masks and cram themselves into cafés and restaurants without any safety measurements. Every sense of caution and responsibility is thrown overboard. This essay will explain why that caution and responsibility should be securely stretched over your nose and mouth.

Of course, there were people throughout the entire pandemic who were unable to locate where their nose is and therefore only covered their mouth or people who thought that the mask would look best covering their double chin, since all the gyms were closed at the time. But these days the numbers of people who deem masks as unnecessary is increasing immensely. I work at a gas station. At least five customers per hour fail to wear masks correctly or wear the wrong kind. This varies from wearing the mask that was lying on the floor of their car for the last couple of months to wearing their child's tiny mask, barely covering their nose, just because it was the first one, they grabbed. On average I encounter at least two customers per hour who do not bother to wear any kind of mask.

Most of the time, people scowl or give me a wounded look when I ask them to put on a mask.

Last week I asked a man in his fifties if it was possible for him to wear a mask the next time he enters the store. I purposely ask this question at the end of each encounter because I do not like the death glares I would receive while my card reader is processing their payment. He happily told me that masks are not mandatory anymore. I immediately told him that this is not true, and after three minutes of arguing he stormed off yelling that I should "go fuck off and stop bothering him with my stupid rules and weird restrictions of his freedom." I remember

barely keeping myself from punching the glass shield in front of me after this encounter. Minimum wage is not nearly enough to deal with this type of customer.

People have always been extremely ignorant, even more so during this pandemic. People who were fortunate enough to receive the vaccine are even more likely to forget their masks and then joyfully proclaim that “one shall not worry since they are fully vaccinated” which in theory is great, I was and am happy for everyone who received the vaccine, but this does not mean that you cannot transfer the virus onto another person who might not be vaccinated. It is great that people who are compromised by their age and or health are a priority when it comes to the vaccine, but these people need to realise that this is a privilege and people who work in mini jobs as for example gas station workers or waiters are not able to get the vaccine just yet, due to them being a lesser priority group.

I was lucky to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine two weeks ago and not once in these two weeks did I even consider not wearing my mask. I know that the vaccine is a great tool to prevent the spread of covid but at this current state the vaccine is nothing without measurements like wearing masks and social distancing.

Of course, the vaccine does give some sort of comfort and safety, but one needs to remember that currently only twenty-eight percent of our entire country have received their complete dosage. For me this means that, yes, I can worry a bit less about Covid and the fear of endangering my family, but it is also my responsibility to keep following the safety instruction to help others protect their loved ones. And this is why one should wear a mask.

Alone With My Mum

By Mara Kunert

My parents fought so much that they eventually had to break up before I was born. After my birth, they got back together, tried to make it work once more. When I was one year old, they split up for good. After that, I stayed with my mum; my dad moved to Vienna. I am in touch with him. Even after 20 years, he calls me weekly to see how I am doing. But even though he calls, I have not seen him since I was 16 or 17 years old. I know that it is unusual that even though my parents were not together; and I stayed with my mum, my dad's side of the family accepted me as a part of their family. My dad's sisters frequently ask how I am doing; my grandma cares a lot about me.

Sometimes I felt ashamed because I did not have the typical, classical, picture-perfect family constellation, consisting of two parents, a mother and a father, being married and living together. So, I "lied" to people I just met. When I would talk about my situation at home, I would say "my parents" instead of "my mum". All my friends grew up in a "perfect family". I remember one evening where I felt like an outsider. My best friends were exchanging stories about how their father reacted the first time they got the contraceptive pill. I was sitting next to them, quiet, realizing that I would never experience these kinds of moments with my dad.

In primary school, when I was around 6 or 7 years old, we had to craft a book for our dads for Father's Day, in which we would explain why our dads were the "best dad in the world" and why we loved them so much; the assignment being for children with a single mother as well as for those whose dads were not "the best". I remember that I did not know how to act since I had no dad at home. Telling my teacher my "problem"—she insisted I still had to craft the book; she had given the assignment, and I had to complete it no matter what. She told me that I could give my dad the book the next time I would see him. I still have the book; it is in a drawer on my desk. I never thought of giving it to my father, as my relationship with him can be difficult from time to time. I often thought of burning the book, thinking that this would set my mind free from all worries concerning the issues around my dad. But somehow, I never did; it is still there where it was for the last five years. Even though this all happened 15 years ago, I often come back to it. I realize from that age on I seemed to be different than others.

But growing up with my mum being a single parent was not the only thing that made me feel like I did not belong somewhere. There is the aspect of me looking more like my dad's side of the family. I look like the clone of one of my dad's sisters; being tall, having dark brown hair and eyes, being so pale that I could be part of a vampire movie. I was doomed to look like the one member of the family my mum did not want to remember.

As I grow older, I think it was for the best that I grew up with my mum. I am sure that the fighting between my parents would have got worse over time. It was good they split up this early as I barely remember anything. I think life would have been more difficult for me when my parents had decided to break up when I was 8 or 9 years old. Some of my friends experienced this; it caused so much harm and emotional damage that they suffered from depression. I could say that I am glad how my parent's relationship ended. Over time I have acknowledged that even though I look nothing like my mum's side of the family, I always have my dad's side by my side, always in my heart, as it embodies what people see of me the first time they meet me.

Cheryl Strayed's Independence and The Pacific Crest Trail

By Vanessa Titz

Cheryl Strayed is a woman who lost her mother and had intended to destroy herself as a consequence of her grief. In order to prevent further self-destructive, damaging deeds, which she would regret, and having already betrayed her husband frequently and consumed dangerous drugs, she decides to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. Critics of her autobiography, *Wild*, believe that hiking the Pacific Crest Trail did not change her and that her decision was reckless. Those who find her reckless fail to perceive her bravery in the face of angers and hardships—a transformation this essay will explore.

Her decision to hike does seem reckless when she does not prepare herself, for example, by attending a class for hikers. Strayed takes a heavy knapsack, the weight of which she compares to a Volkswagen Beetle. Her comparison reveals her awareness of the heavy weight but her strong will to endure the weight of the knapsack shows not only her recklessness to the risk of damaging her spine but also her will to make a change within herself, without any help from outside. Her strong determination to change helps her cope with her grief as well as complete her demands on herself, e.g. to become the person she wants to be and to gain her independence from her mother, men and society through hiking the Pacific Crest Trail.

According to Kam, a book reviewer who opposes Strayed's idea of hiking, "[t]he concept of the wilderness as a recuperative force is offset by the extent to which it is depicted as life threatening: interpretation of [...] Strayed's respective journeys range from admiration for [her] independent spirit to condemnation for solipsistic stupidity." I argue that Strayed's hiking on the Pacific Crest Trail is not a "solipsistic stupidity", which means to be reckless by being self-centered, since the hike on the Pacific Crest Trail helps her to recover from her grief and to become independent.

Another reviewer of the autobiography, an Amazon reviewer, Garner, implies that Strayed does become tougher in a psychological as well as in a physical way. He refers to the scenes in which she runs out of water and has dangerous encounters with men and wild animals. Those scenes show Strayed's determination to continue the hike, even when her life is at risk. So, I concede like Garner, that she becomes tougher because the physical pain she suffers

outweighs her psychological pain of loss, which seemed to her at first more painful and almost lead her to self-destruction.

In the scene where she has no water, Strayed acknowledges that the physical pain of her body and her need to drink are more important than her psychological pain of loss, although she expected the opposite. So, the hiking process forces her to focus on reality and on survival, through her own strength. Strayed's lamenting about her physical and mental pain could certainly be regarded as a weakness if she had focused only on pitying herself but this is not the case. Her proven perseverance makes her strong. Hence, there are no personal obstacles which can prevent her from becoming independent.

In the case of becoming independent, Garner refers to two men who threaten Strayed on the trail, apparently resenting her greater knowledge of water purification devices—resenting her strength as well as resenting their own need for advice. In this scene, these men are looking for drinkable water and she offers her purifier to them, which they do not understand how to use. Strayed lectures them: “you have to give it some muscle [...] you weren't supposed to let the tube go into the mud like that [...] you were supposed to keep it up in the water” (Strayed, 284). By using the phrase “supposed to” repetitively, one can notice that she is angry at these men because their carelessness is destroying her purifier. Moreover, instead of apologizing, these men keep on complaining to her demanding to drink. Although Strayed does not know their true intentions, she has the courage to lecture them and this reveals her newly found strength. Some might argue at this point that she is reckless for offending their manliness, an act that could and actually did turn them against her. These men obviously feel inferior because they are being lectured by a woman and compensate for this feeling by implying that they will rape her. Through showing her that they actually have power over her, such as a hunter has over a prey, they believe that will restore their manhood. They want to show Strayed that she is inferior to them by making sexist remarks about her: “she's got a really nice figure, don't she? [...] Healthy, with some soft curves. Just the kind I like” (Strayed, 285). With these sexist remarks, these men want to show that she is an object they can possess.

In this moment, Strayed does not panic but tries to cope with the situation through strategy. Her strategy is to simply walk away and hide her fear. She explains: “it was as if I'd finally come across a mountain lion and I'd remembered, against all instinct, not to run. Not to incite him with my fast motions or antagonize him with my anger or arouse him with fear” (Strayed, 286). With this scene, Strayed proves that she does not need anyone to protect her because she

is not helpless but strong and sharp. By learning how to behave in a dangerous situation, she gains independence. It is questionable whether she would have had enough physical strength to protect herself from these two men together, therefore her behavior shows that she is not always reckless as some reviewers might indicate. Furthermore, the scene illuminates her newly gained strength, in a psychological way, in being able to make quick, life-depending decisions, and in a physical way in having self-sufficient strength, more strength than these two men, to be able to use the purifier.

Another important scene to which Garner refers, is the moment when she meets a red fox. She experiences the red fox as a reincarnation of her mother and calls after it several times, “Mom! Mom! Mom! Mom!” (Strayed, 144). At first the fox is interested in her but like her mother, it leaves her and she calls desperately after it, begging it to stay because it is her only companion in the wilderness. At first glance, Strayed seems to be trapped by her grief and does not show any signs of recovery. In an interview with the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA), Strayed explains this scene by stating that she felt “alone”, “uncertain” and “afraid” but she also felt “strength” when she encountered the red fox. So, on the one hand, the appearance of the fox makes her grief over the loss of her mother resurface. But on the other hand, the encounter also reminds her that she still has the wild animals as companions and that many of them trust her—when she has not trusted herself. This knowledge that she is not alone gives her the strength to continue walking and to continue her quest.

One of the reviewers, an Amazon reader, Deb, does not see any connection between Strayed’s experiences of the Pacific Crest Trail hiking and her healing process. I disagree and say that her growth was mostly influenced by her tough experiences on the trail as well as the beauty of nature, which helped her to forget the psychological and physical pain she was experiencing. Strayed also confirms the impact the beauty had on her growth by stating:

“In moments amongst my various agonies, I noticed the beauty that surrounded me, the wonder of things both small and large: the color of a desert flower that brushed against me on the trail or the grand sweep of the sky as the sun faded over the mountains. I was in the midst of such a reverie when I skidded on pebbles and fell” (Strayed, 67)

The beauty she encounters is like an unlimited resource which gives her strength and helps her to stay determined and to keep walking. The effect of this resource which evokes positive energy in her and which she knows from her childhood, is stronger than her feelings of misery. Especially in her times of suffering, her perception of nature becomes more focused

and even overwhelms her emotionally and fills her with positive feelings that help her to continue her will.

Furthermore, Strayed's experiences of the Pacific Crest Trail are reminding her of the childhood experiences she made in nature, thus she now recognizes as it her "home" and where she feels welcomed and comfortable. These feelings allow her to find psychological peace because she has found a place where she belongs and is not "strayed", straying from save true path anymore, as her name implies.

Another Amazon reviewer, Deka, criticizes Strayed for not making any psychological changes while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail and for only wanting attention from the reader for her poor fate. This comment fails to perceive that there is enough proof of her growth. For instance, by being confronted with memories of her mother, Strayed recognizes the importance of her becoming dependent on no one but herself. She had relied on her mother her whole life until her mother's death. By gaining independence, Strayed gives up her role of being a child and finally takes on the role of an adult.

Strayed's maturity development can be seen when she meets a deer. Her behavior here alters drastically in contrast to the fox scene. Instead of begging the deer to stay, Strayed accepts that for her growth, it is necessary for her to be alone on the journey. Strayed is not afraid of the deer and tells it that it is safe in "this world", in the meaning of her being also safe in the world of the Pacific Crest Trail and all the unknown obstacles that come along with it.

The deer is the way Strayed was at the time when she encountered the fox. She was afraid of it just as the deer is afraid of her in this scene. The deer represents Strayed just as the fox represents her mother and this shows the deep connection between her and the world she now finds herself in. Hence, these animals are no longer strangers to her; there is a familiarity in the connection they have with one another. This bonding takes her fear of being unprotected in the wild and gives her strength, in the meaning of mental support, the kind she received from her mother Bobbi before. With that insight, Strayed is becoming a self-sufficient woman who recognizes that she can be on her own, without her parents.

Nevertheless, other Amazon reviewers of Strayed's autobiography, Keith and Reinhold, remain unconvinced of Strayed's new independence and of the correction of her morals. They perceive her as being too self-centered. I believe they see a contradiction between Strayed's claim of independence and her possession of condoms, a possible wish to have sex out on the

trail. Strayed does show improvement in that her interest is not to have sex with every man on the Pacific Crest Trail but only with Jonathan, a man to whom she is attracted.

Jonathan is the first man in a long time with whom she experiences the normal first steps of a romantic relationship, such as having a date. Here, she is not being controlled by her sexual desire. Although she is strongly attracted to him, she has inhibitions such as feeling shy about showing her not “womanlike” body, a body which consists merely of muscle and injuries that is formed by the hard experiences on the Pacific Crest Trail. In this case, sex with Jonathan does not mean a regression to her past but a progress, the acceptance of her new formed, not typical curvy-womanlike outward appearance.

Moreover, sex with Jonathan also carries a moral lesson for Strayed. It becomes a reconciliation between her new self and her old ways of being in a relationship. Strayed is confronted with her past, her betrayal of her husband, her compulsive desire for sex and with her guilt. She begins to reflect on and be aware of the consequences of her behavior. Her guilt at first prevents her from having sex with Jonathan. She recognizes an old behavior of wanting to have sex and thinks that acting it out would mean further damage to herself. This in turn would deepen her grief and self-destructive behavior. She feels that she must forgive herself first for the pain she caused her husband, Paul, before she succumbs to her desires. Strayed walks alone on a beach, where she used to write Paul’s name in the sand and reflects that she is done feeling guilty and done hurting herself for Paul.

“[...] I knew I was doing it for the last time. I didn’t want to hurt for him anymore, to wonder, in leaving him I’d make a mistake, I torment myself with all the ways I wronged him. What if I forgave myself? I thought. *What if I was sorry, but if I could go back in time I wouldn’t do a single thing differently? What if I’d wanted to fuck every single one of those men?*” (Strayed, 258).

She does not want to feel tormented about all the ways she hurt him or wonder if she made a mistake by leaving him.

Her reflection can be regarded as one more step into the right direction for her because she finally takes full responsibility for her actions and for the consequences they had on her and on her marriage by accepting her past sinful deeds which she can and would not change in the past due to her psychological condition. By accepting the consequences of her deeds, Strayed

can finally and mentally end the connection with Paul and with that she also ends the duty she had as a wife by writing his name in the sand for the last time.

In contrast to her compulsive past Strayed is now putting effort into not being self-destructive anymore. She takes care of her psychological needs first before taking any action. She self-reflects about her behavior in the past and brings a closure to unwanted behavior.

In the scene with Jonathan she also realizes that she has become more independent and confident. For instance, she is able to lie next to a handsome friend whom she also longs for and confirms: “For once I didn’t ache for a companion. For once the phrase a woman with a hole in her heart didn’t thunder into my head”. Her statement reveals her real reason for sleeping with men and this is the grief of being left alone by her mother which she thought that she could not overcome on her own but this does change after her recovery. Strayed confirms that she no longer needs a companion and this equates to not only a psychological independence but in this case, an independence from men, too.

In conclusion, Strayed is a “heroic” in her own right. All the decisions she is making are essentially for herself but personal growth and a positive change in her will, influence everyone and everything of importance within her environment on and off the trail. How respectful and reflective her decisions are towards herself and her life will be reflected in how she treats others and in how she treats the environment around her.

Strayed’s courage to hike The Pacific Crest Trail alone must be praised. This is a wilderness with all the possible endangerments attached to it and the fact that she, as a woman who went into that adventure alone, with no real preparation is inspiring. One might argue that exactly this point, having taken no real preparation, is reckless and naive but it is her spontaneous reaction to her coping with her grief.

The criticism by some reviewers of her having learnt nothing while on the Pacific Crest Trail can be refuted. She does recover from her grief through her reconnection to nature, which brings an inner reconnection to (memories of) her mother and through experiences on the trail that helped her discover and develop what strengths and capabilities she actually has.

The Pacific Crest Trail inspires Strayed through its beautiful nature and her learning to feel safe in the outdoors lessens her anxiety and evokes confidence in herself, a strength that is new to her. The wild animals, especially, give Strayed a feeling of support but unlike the support of her mother, Strayed does not become dependent on them.

Strayed's determination in overcoming obstacles and in staying committed to achieving her aim of finishing the trail is the main reason for her gaining independence in the end.

Furthermore, Strayed develops a physical and psychological strength by moving beyond the mental pain of loss as well as the physical pain from injuries she endured on the trail. Her perseverance shows that she is not seeking sympathy from the reader.

Strayed's ability to self-reflect and admit her wrong doings is due to her being out alone on the Pacific Crest Trail for a long period of time. There is no distraction from taking an honest look at herself, which she does. Furthermore, self-reflection and admittance of responsibility for her behavior underline her honesty and are just the first steps towards permanent change.

Although Strayed seems to make reckless decisions at times, she becomes mature along the way. In the end, the Pacific Crest Trail positively shapes her character, her thinking and her spirit in more ways than it is life-threatening to her.

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Women in Politics: An Uphill Battle

By Jana Eismann

“Annalena Baerbock is a terrible mother! She cares nothing for her children!” Even before she officially became the Grünen’s candidate for the chancellery, Annalena Baerbock had to face the blatant sexism of politics. In every interview, she was asked how she would manage Germany’s top position while also taking care of her two young daughters. The German term “Rabenmutter”, a wilfully negligent mother, was tossed around immediately. A reference to the mistaken assumption that ravens oust their young from the nest to avoid having to feed them, the term is often applied to working mothers. Especially in conservative circles the term is used with fervour to insult women deviating from the “traditional family image” – in Baerbock’s case, her husband will be taking care of the majority of their day-to-day household chores. Baerbock’s critics quickly jumped on the bandwagon and added Baerbock’s perceived shortcomings as a mother to their list of reasons against her nomination. But that motherhood can be compatible with leading positions is something that has already been proven by the ascents of Finnish prime minister Sanna Marin and her Danish colleague Mette Frederiksen, to name only a few success stories of working mothers.

Baerbock’s male contender Markus Söder, father of three teenage children, faced no similar accusations of neglect or questions about his children. The families of male politicians are never brought up in debates about their qualifications. Barack Obama had two daughters roughly the same age as Annalena Baerbock’s when he was elected into the Oval Office. Did anyone ask him about being a good father while also having a demanding career? Of course not. Because only female politicians have to jump through the hoops of motherhood.

Motherhood, as in Baerbock’s case, is a very common theme in work-related sexism. Any young woman with a career is used to having potential motherhood hanging over her head like a sword of Damocles. “Any day now, she will get pregnant and leave.” “Her child might get sick and she will have to drop everything.” Hiring and promoting young women are HR-minefields, because motherhood could supposedly change a woman’s priorities at any moment – or make training a new hire to replace her necessary. Especially in politics, having a family and working are clearly seen incompatible, although many women work and raise children at the same time just fine. Men are fathers while also pursuing careers and nobody

thinks twice about it. Funny, how for women having children is a burden weighing them down while for men, having children is an admirable asset – he must be promoted immediately, he is providing for a family! Or if politics are concerned: she is a terrible mother for abandoning her children for work; he is such an empathic man because having children means he cares for others.

Jacinda Ardern, incumbent Prime Minister of New Zealand, certainly proved that being a mother does not restrict a woman's ability to lead a nation. Three years ago, she became the second woman in history to give birth while serving as the head of a nation. Announcing her pregnancy only days before taking office, she was heavily criticized by her opponents for not being open about her family plans with the people and for taking time off for the birth so soon after taking over. Despite the critique, Ardern remained a popular and effective politician, who can count her decisive responses to the Corona-crisis as well as to the tragic mass-shooting in Christchurch in 2019 among her accomplishments. But still it is clear what dominated the international press about this successful woman: Even without a quick Google search, everyone knows about her giving birth while holding office. Somehow the focus remained not on Ardern's successes but predominantly on her motherhood, showing yet again that female politicians have a harder time getting recognized for their achievements – in Ardern's case her impressive handling of recent national crises – than men will ever have.

Recognition is also hard to achieve because often enough all accomplishments of a female politician are tied to her gender. In Annalena Baerbock's case, for example, many sceptics think she only got the nomination of her party because she is a woman – and putting women into leading positions is exactly the kind of left-wing feminist propaganda the Grünen party stand for in the eyes of its opponents. Thinking like this discredits all the hard work Baerbock put in to get where she is now. She earned that position on merit, not on the basis of her gender. Claiming anything else is saying that nothing a woman ever does will earn her a position – she can only get a position handed to her in the name of radical feminism and to fill the quota. If Baerbock's opponent Robert Habeck had won the Grünen nomination, nobody would have suggested it is because he is a man. Everyone would have assumed that he was more qualified, the better fit or simply polled better. Only a woman's victory could ever be questioned the way Annalena Baerbock's is now.

There is an obvious double standard in politics, where men seemingly can do no wrong and women can do no right. A self-assured woman is a “pushy bitch”, a self-assured man is confident and knows how to stand his ground. During the 2016 US presidential election,

Hillary Clinton, an experienced stateswoman with decades of expertise, was often called an assertive bitch by critics; too cold, too unapproachable to vote for. (As first lady, she was once compared to the ruthless Lady Macbeth for her outspokenness.) Trump, on the other hand, never had to worry about likability. Terribly ill-mannered, he could be as rude, pushy and arrogant as he liked – in fact, those very attributes won him many votes. What was celebrated in Trump was demonized in Clinton, even if Clinton’s arrogance was only a fraction of the arrogance Trump displayed. This paradox suggests Clinton could only lose: Her confidence made her unlikable, but not showing confidence would have been equally criticised.

An even worse hurdle for women to cross is the incredibly infuriating prejudice that women are too emotional to lead. A study by the Georgetown University found that about 13% of Americans still believe that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women.^[1] This stereotype should long be a thing of the past and yet, women continue to be accused of being “too emotional” – by strangers on the internet and even by their own colleagues. Canadian MP Michelle Rempel Garner remembered an incident where another MP suggested they talk when she was “less emotional”.^[2] US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, always a popular target for sexist comments online, was attacked by a reporter for “reinforcing the stereotype that women are too emotional for politics” with her “frequent crying”.^[3] A woman behaving like US Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh – openly showing emotions – did in his confirmation hearing would have never been confirmed to any position. There are so many examples of male politicians falling apart emotionally at the slightest setback while female politicians, used to intense criticism and scrutiny, stoically carry on. And yet, women are deemed to be too emotional. Men, meanwhile, routinely get away with the behaviour women are accused of and do not even realize it.

A closer look at Clinton’s and Trump’s respective scandals further reveals how female politicians are always judged more harshly than their male counterparts. Clinton’s relatively minor scandal – work-related emails sent from a private email-account – was blown completely out of proportion, while Trump’s decades-long criminal business dealings, dubious taxes and sexual assault accusations were swept under the rug. If a couple of emails were enough for millions of people to ask for Clinton to be jailed, what would have happened if she had settled sexual assault lawsuits like Trump did on the regular? Conservatives would have frothed at the mouth with rage. Clinton also saw her moral character extensively questioned by critics because she forgave her husband’s extramarital affair. Trump *having* an extramarital affair, meanwhile, was of little importance.

Trump himself touched on this unequal treatment of scandals when, in reference to his supporters' loyalty, he proclaimed that he "could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody, and [he] wouldn't lose any voters [...]." [4] In other words, no scandal – not even coldblooded murder – could ever hurt him. Clinton, meanwhile, joked that she had "a feeling that by the end of this evening [she's] going to be blamed for everything that's ever happened" [5] during the first presidential debate in 2016. It was this double-standard where women always draw the shorter straw that eventually cost Clinton the presidency although she was clearly the better fit. Women have to fight twice as hard as men to make it in politics and even then sexism can always thwart them at the finishing line. All this is not to say that the behaviour of female candidates should not be closely scrutinized. It definitely should – but in the same manner the behaviour of male candidates is.

Appearance is another area where women are consistently under closer scrutiny than men. Especially in politics, competence is closely connected to appearance. A woman paying no close attention to her dress because she is more focused on her policies? The talk about her dress would drown any talk about policies out. Angela Merkel, who is not exactly a fashion icon, has had much (clearly unwanted) attention paid to her pant suits – so much so that they became signature. Men are not held to such standards. Does any male politician have a signature style? They all get away with wearing the same dark suit all day, every day. While every stray hair on a woman's head is criticized, men like Boris Johnson and Donald Trump can get elected to the highest offices of their respective countries looking like they have never seen a mirror up close. Imagine a female politician showing up with Johnson's wild hair or Trump's bad spray tan. Could she even try for the lowest office before someone laughed her offstage?

Anyone who thinks feminism has done all it can and that men and women are treated equally in western society clearly needs a reality check. Politics is just one of the many spheres in which women have a much harder time asserting themselves than men have. The current debate around Annalena Baerbock's parenting skills is just another example in a lengthy list of examples. I hope to see no more in the future but realistically society still has a long way to go.

[1] Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Kathryn Peltier Campbell: May the Best Woman Win? Education and Bias against Women in American Politics, Washington D.C., 2019. Link [Women in Politics.pdf \(georgetown.edu\)](#) (accessed on Jul 7 2021)

[2] Michelle Rempel: Confront your Sexism, in: National Post, Apr 18 2016. Link [Michelle Rempel: Confront your sexism | National Post](#) (accessed on Jul 7 2021)

[3] Molly Prince [mollyfprince] (Oct 15 2019). I'll say it: @AOC's frequent crying only reinforces the stereotype that women are too emotional for politics. [Tweet]. Twitter. Link [Molly Prince "I'll say it: @AOC's frequent crying only reinforces the stereotype that women are too emotional for politics."](#)

[4] Donald Trump, Campaign Rally Speech, Sioux Centre, Iowa, on Jan 23 2016.

[5] Hillary Clinton, First Presidential Debate, Hempstead, New York, on Sep 26 2016.

Why I Won't Be a Bog-Standard Parent?

By Freya Pauluschke

My friends always describe my parents as “hippies” which is kind of true. Our family home is colourful, artsy and a bit greenie. We have a poster with the earth on it hanging on the kitchen door which says “Die Mietsache ist schonend zu behandeln und in gutem Zustand zurückzugeben,” in English “the rented property is to be handled with care and returned in good condition.” My mother is free-spirited and creative. She always wears colourful flower-barrettes in her long grey-white hair which she often pins up into a big bun and her sense of fashion is quite different from other mid-fifty-year-old mums. Meaning she sometimes wears a pink or purple tone-in-tone outfit, pink Converse Chucks with different coloured and patterned shoelaces or on another day she wears a black or grey outfit but not just a pair of jeans and a shirt, more edgy and grungy with leather boots and a velvet blazer. My father used to be cooler when he was younger but now, he can even be a bit square. He used to have long curly hair to the navel, do motorcycle tours in a leather jacket, paint his bathroom pink, and fly-poster for concerts. His hobby was making music and he was a steward at concerts and managed the checkout at clubs which means he was also the bouncer. I guess one could say my father and his friends were the people their parents always warned them about. Today my dad's outer appearance seems quite common but deep inside he still has that unconventional attitude sometimes. One can say that both of my parents enjoyed their youth to the fullest.

My sister and I had a quite independent upbringing. We learned how to cook on our own very early and were always included in any handcraft stuff my parents were working on, for example building my bed, fixing a flat tyre, cutting a hedge or felting coasters. In contrast to students who were driven to school every morning until 10th grade by their parents I wanted to walk alone to elementary school after a few days in first grade. No matter what others might think of us we were always told to be ourselves.

There is one thing that sets me apart from my friends and a lot of people, mostly girls and women: the fear of being alone at night outside in the dark. I am not afraid to walk home alone at 3am, not even if I have to pass a district or street which is known for let's say being criminal, intoxicated or just homeless people. I always asked myself why I am not afraid of walking home at night through the dark streets like all my other friends. I believe the reason is that my parents used to clarify what I should do when something happens to me in

emergencies from early on. Another important reason is that my parents never caused me or my sister to be frightened. I am sure that there are many mothers who will pay the cab for their children or offer to pick them up instead of letting them walk home alone at night. My father always says: “See how you manage to get home on your own.” I always did and I still do; this is their way of parenting. He never drives me anywhere unless the destination is far away and hard to reach by public transport or I have a lot to carry. I am not one of those kids who could always rely on their parents to pick them up from a friend or from school although they could have easily walked the 15-minutes-way. Our parents always supported my sister and me in what we wanted to do. There has never been an unhealthy amount of pressure to achieve. As long as we were happy with what we were doing, they were too, and I think that is not self-evident.

I grew up without a TV and I still do not have one. My childhood consisted of playing outside in the woods or on the streets of my neighbourhood. Unlike other children around me I got a mobile phone late at the age of 14. When I see kids and teens today, I am shocked by their behaviour and attitude towards mobiles. Especially, when I see a mother with her four-year-old child in a buggy. She is on her phone, maybe calling someone and not paying attention to her child. But in fact, the kid does not even need her attention because it stares at the screen of another mobile, playing some game at full volume. I think such situations are very sad to watch because I have the feeling that those kids are growing up in the wrong way. Parents should interact with their children. These young kids get used to a surrounding of stupid mobile phone games and absent parents. I think they do not discover their real environment enough. Children should play in nature and come back home full of dirt and holding an earthworm in their hands. They should have the freedom to stare at foreigners, noticing anyone who looks different from whatever they had seen at home and ask openly for example why the, for adults obviously, pregnant lady in the tram has such a big belly. Kids should walk around with a curious glance and enjoy the adventure of a long train ride by watching these beautiful yellow rapeseed fields rushing by.

One might say that the upbringing of my parents influences the way I want to raise my own children and yes, that would probably be true. But still, I do not want to be exactly like my parents, I definitely also had my difficulties with them. Nevertheless, I strive to not be a bog-standard mum. I want to be a carefree but not a careless parent. I want to have an amicable relationship with my kids, but I do not want to be the “best-friend-mum”. I do not want to be a square with a mania of cleaning my all-white-plain-and-minimalistic-decoration house

because that is just boring, unloving, and impersonal. I want to have a *Villa Villekulla* with self-made art by the whole family hanging on petrol blue, pink or mustard yellow walls. I do not want my kids to grow up with a lot of technology because I did not either and that did not cause me any harm. But I want to watch independent, intellectual, and aesthetic films with my children. I want to do dance-afternoons to old songs my parents used to jam to. I will not be a bog-standard parent.

Why I Write

By Maria Kaserer

I write because I can better put my feelings on a piece of paper than keep them locked up in my heart. Writing down emotions I feel or thoughts I have in one particular moment makes them everlasting for me. Unforgettable moments in a love relationship stay with me forever. Like the first time my boyfriend called me by the nickname he gave me, the moment he promised me that he would keep my heart safe forever or that one night we planned to go out on a fancy date night but ended up cuddling and watching a movie in bed. Yet, for me there is something unique in the way you remember such moments and emotions if they are immortalized as written words.

Something magical happens when I type on my keyboard or scribble in my notebook: Memories I have of a specific situation, no matter if influenced by heartbreak or overwhelming happiness, get even more intense as soon as I write them down. Words allow emotions and feeling to become more tangible. Playing with synonyms, creating similes or metaphors, describing a single moment in time with the most lyrical adjectives there are, all this allows me to experience those feelings I want to grasp with my words all over again. I want to capture my emotions and try to echo them in my writing as precisely as they were in that moment. Not for anyone else to share with, but just for myself.

Since I am an introvert I would never feel the urge to share something so intimate with anyone other than myself. When I was a child, I used to write small poems about banal things for my parents to gift them on Christmas or their birthdays. Looking back, I know those poems were no good, even though I felt like Goethe reborn at that time. Because they did not give insight into my emotional world, I did not mind when my mother read them out loud to other people. Once when I was about eight years old, a short story about a forest fairy who I believed to be my best friend, was published in a newspaper. Then again, I did not care about that because it was a made up story and did not reveal any real feelings.

As I got older I completely abandoned writing short stories and developed a growing interest, or better fascination, for poetry. Inspired by the works of Julia Engelmann, Rupi Kaur, Lili Reinhart and Courtney Peppernell, I experimented with words, how they rhyme and how the feelings I tried to express were best put into words. Right from the start it was clear to me that I would have to write in English because I could not make German sound soft, lyrical or

romantic. Another observation I made rather quickly was that, even though my texts were inspired by poetry, they often did not have to rhyme in order for me to like them. My poems represent intense romantic emotion in verse, often as extended metaphors:

*If your kisses were music,
we would waltz all night.
If there was a color to resemble your soul,
I'd paint all my walls with it.*

Sometimes, they are only single sentences, in which I capture a strong emotion or moving thought:

Time without you feels like waiting until I can be with you again.

Every once in a while, I like to write complete poems of the traditional kind with a rhyme scheme and multiple stanzas. More often than that, when I feel the urge to write about a new memory added to my heart, I tend produce a very few lines in the style seen above. Nearly all of the ones I have written over the past three years are about the love, passion and tears of my relationship. No tacky love poems about how much I love my boyfriend, but words about how our love makes me feel, intense moments we shared and sometimes even about the doubts and fears I have. I do not know why some emotions make me want to write more than others, but I see just as much potential in painful moments as in happy ones. Like most poets, I feel greatly inspired by sorrow:

I fear that one day, someone else will put kisses on your lips and wipe away your memories of me.

I call you my prince so you won't notice I'm not a princess.

I keep all my poetic texts in a document on my laptop but whenever inspiration overcomes me I write with what I have available at that second. It can either be a piece of paper, a napkin or my phone as long as I can somehow secure those words and add them to my document later. I rarely edit my poems after they are done. In a way I then can relive the moments and emotions I once wrote about or even make them an incentive for new poems. Probably none of my works would ever be good enough to be published, even after all these years of me writing. I do not mind that. It is something that gives me joy, something that fills my heart

with passion, but surely nothing that I want to put out for everyone to read and make money off of.

I write because it gives me the opportunity to preserve my romantic emotions and moments in my relationship in a more intense, exceptional and everlasting way than my mind would ever be able to. Not to share those intimacies with the world but to remind myself of how powerful, vulnerable, tender and at the same time crushing love can be.

How to Write Your First Song in the Key of C major

By Joel Weckermann

The piano is one of the world's greatest instruments, but it can be difficult to wrap your head around those 88 white and black keys if you are setting out to learn how to play for the first time. If you are completely new to the piano and want to get started, the key of C major is the best and easiest place to start. In music theory, the black keys on the keyboard are called accidentals, and C major is the only major key in music that doesn't feature any of them. Learning scales, chords and songs in C major can give you the knowledge and chops to be able to play in any key in music. The Key of C major is used in famous songs like 'Imagine' by John Lennon, 'Wake me up before you go-go' by Wham! or 'Let it be' by The Beatles. Used by those legendary songwriters mentioned above and its accessibility for beginners, C major is a great starting point for writing and performing your first song.

- Firstly you need to prepare yourself. Get cozy, take a few sips out of your half-full glass of wine and sit down in front of your keyboard. Take a look for the middle C on the keyboard. You will find it because it will have two black notes to the right of it and one white note to the left of it. Take your index finger and put it on that C.
- Secondly, put a little friend in there. That little friend is going to be your middle finger. You are going to put it on the next adjacent white note D, which is on C's right. Now to add the next note to the chord you are going to take your thumb and put it on G. To find G, I want you to count down from C three white notes. Altogether index on C then middle on D and thumb on G. Great, now you got your first chord. If you want to spice it up a little more, get your pinkie up to an octave G, so let's go from bottom to top, G C D G.
- Thirdly, take a moment and get used to your right-hand chord. The next step would be adding the root note with your left hand. The root note would be of course C two octaves below. Get your fingers on all the notes mentioned beforehand and press them all down.
- Congratulations you've just learned a life-changing way to play C major. If you have a sustain pedal, hold it with your foot, play the chord and get used to the sustain pedal sustaining the chord. The chord will hold as long as you hold your foot down. It sounds absurd, but now you have the technique needed to play thousands of songs.

- Fourthly, comes the magic – don't you dare to move that right hand, keep it right on G C D G. Keeping the hand in this position creates a discomfort but that effort is worth the price of discomfort. What is amazing with this chord is any white note on the entire keyboard with this C major voicing will create a lovely chord.
- Fifthly, count up three white notes from your low C to F. Change the root note with your left hand from C to F and back to C while your right-hand stays where it was supposed to. So now you have your refrain. You can add a second part by figuring out several white notes to play with your left hand while your right-hand stays on that chord.
- Lastly comes the most difficult part: writing lyrics with decent meaning. The first thing to remember is that songs tell stories. The best songs are about people, situations, and they are about what people say to other people because of the situation they are in. In a song, those stories are usually ultra-simple – two people in love, two people breaking up, somebody warning someone about someone else. But the power of thinking about songs this way is that it gives you a concrete concept to build the rest of your song around. To come up with a solid song idea and writing in general, including an essay for class, you are going to want to answer these two fundamental questions: Who is singing the song? What is the person trying to say? So to find a good song idea, all you have to do is come up with a situation or story and use it to answer these three questions.
- This is not as complicated as it sounds. Your song might be a love song, sung by a guy to his girlfriend, and he is trying to say 'I've never met anyone as special as you'. Or in a world where everyone throws his political commentary into the world like a frisbee, your song might be sung by you to the world saying , the government is bad, screw you guys'. Try to improvise, soon melodies are flowing in your head. Even if you can't finish your song the first time you picked up writing, leave it alone a couple of days and try later on. Of course you have to play and sing at the same time later on, but as everyone knows – practice makes perfect.
- Performing your song is a nice party trick for sure but playing the piano makes you smarter. Science has shown that practicing an instrument engages all of the areas of your brain. Practice and performance require repetition. Repetition creates myelin which forms around our nerves and works as a blanket for the pathways in our brain allowing information to travel efficiently throughout our brain. The more myelin we create the more efficiently information can pass where it needs to go. In a world where people think that the European Green Deal will end climate change by 2050, we need

more intelligent people. So learning the piano would have benefits on both sides –
What do you think?

And there you have it: your first song in the key of C major. Songwriting is like any craft: the more you do it the better you get. Once you are done with your first track, keep the creative juices flowing and keep writing. Once you have one or two songs, start performing at open mics or get opening sets for local acts. Performing live will give you immediate feedback on how well your songs perform. Talk to audience members and artists alike after your performance. See what they liked and didn't like — all feedback is important.

Why Listen to Music?

By Elisa John

I believe that listening to music is something that everyone who is able to do so should practice because it is essential for true happiness in life. We all know these people who say: “I don’t know. Just what’s on the radio, I guess” or “I don’t really listen to music” when asked which kind of music they love listening to. This should be a legitimate answer, considering that everyone loves different things and likes spending their time diversely.

However, the musician Billy Joel once said: “I think music itself is healing. It’s an explosive expression of humanity. It’s something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we’re from.” By stating that he means that we as human beings profit from listening to music individually as well as collectively. And I could not agree more with him. People have been making music for over 40,000 years. This suggests how essential and indispensable music is to human life.

Music unites people and connects them socially. Moreover, music is known for creating an incomparable feeling of cohesion. The most beautiful thing about this is that firstly, this feeling of cohesion is accessible to everyone regardless of gender, age, belief or sexual orientation. And secondly, the form or genre of music is completely irrelevant – whether it is roaring chants in a football arena, national anthems sung at the Olympic Games, headbang-evoking songs at a metal concert, the lullaby that your mother used to sing to you when you were little, the tunes that blurred out of some old speakers on a long gone summer night or the classical quartet that was played when your grandmother walked down the aisle.

Music does not exclude anyone because it is accessible to everyone at any time. Being part of a community or a fandom that sometimes shares more than just the same taste in music but also the values that the song’s lyrics or the artist stand for is an experience that is more bonding than most other things. Friendships and even relationships are very likely to arise from the connection and sensations music can make us feel.

For me, the happiest times in life have always been accompanied by their very own soundtracks. I have had the best time listening to music with dear friends, singing to my family’s favorite songs like Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space”, James Bay’s “Let It Go” and most 90s classics on long car rides and going to concerts of my favorite artists. Music has made me

lose friends, but through that same music I continually find new friends and people who share the same beliefs and values as me. These people, our connection over music and of course the music itself make me feel like I am part of something big and wonderful that, at the same time, still is very intimate and something that just belongs to us.

Benefits music can bring to anyone willing to just listen are fighting loneliness, establishing connections and contacts, uniting people and therefore addressing, tackling and potentially even helping society overcome social issues. Our taste in music makes us belong somewhere. Every human being is trying to find their place in this world. We are all looking for real connection to other people because that is what we need as human beings to be truly happy. Music is one way to finally get to that long-awaited destination and to build connection to people who have come the same way.

A Quiet Place – A Movie to fall asleep to

By Nadine Koch

I am a huge horror fan and would go so far as to claim that I know quite a few things about what makes a horror movie good. From *The Shining* to *Hostel* to *Midsommar* I have watched an estimated 200 horror movies from every horror subgenre existing. I came across many movies which had awful reviews but were surprisingly good. Though there were also some movies which were praised as masterpieces, when I finished them, I was sitting there wondering how they achieved this status because they were not good... at all. John Krasinski's 2018 *A Quiet Place* is one of those movies.

John Krasinski himself and his wife Emily Blunt star as the two protagonists, a married couple with two kids, who live in the near future in complete silence in order to not be killed by alien-like monsters that inhabited the earth.

Sonia Cerca took her time to write a review about this movie and displays it as one of the best horror movies of modern time, which is totally not like every other horror movie. (It is though.) Apparently, it makes the audience feel “genuinely fearful”^[1] and “keeps you on the edge of your seat”^[2]. This makes me question if we are both referring to the same movie. She goes on by exclaiming that the minimal use of the scares kept the movie suspenseful and balanced. After this she keeps on praising the movie as a completely new and innovative horror movie – as if there are not enough monster movies out there already.

I approve of Cerca's statement that the concept of a horror movie being in complete silence, without anyone screaming out in pain or fear is an unusual but surprisingly fascinating one. I must admit that this is the reason which kept me glued to the screen for the first 30 minutes. The suspense and anxiety of the characters not trying to make any noise even made the audience cautious. Emily Blunt's character trying to give birth in a bathtub in complete silence is probably the peak of suspense in the movie. But this tension was ruined once she went to the basement to yell at her husband in an argument. This moment threw me off completely and made me wonder: Why can they yell at each other when the monsters attack at the slightest noise? And since this basement appears to be soundproof why do they spend the majority of the time outside where the monsters are? By releasing this tension the whole

concept of the movie was ruined. After this blunder the movie was not able to gain my interest anymore.

Even the scare factor was not able to make up for this failure. The jump scares were weak and predictable, which is a common weakness in modern horror. They were not used in a minimalistic fashion as *Cerca* proclaimed, but in an overused and annoying way. Most of the scares were wasted on unnecessary sequences like somebody getting grabbed by their arm or something falling outside the window. By only relying on loud noises and random momentum the jump scares turn into blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments. Additionally, only two or three of the scares are related to the monsters or actual danger, but due to the overuse even these could not get someone to throw their popcorn out of shock. If I am being honest the scariest part of the movie was the guy sitting a few seats away from me who constantly put his shoes off and on for no particular reason.

Not to mention that the monsters look like a bootleg version of the Xenomorph from the *Alien* franchise. This made the so called “Uncanny Valley” method completely ineffective. The method is commonly used in horror and is simple yet effective – you basically put humanity somewhere where it should not belong, just like the Xenomorph’s movements and physique resemble the ones of a human. Or you take humanity away from something where it should belong like for example Michael Myers with his slow and inhumane movements and his emotionless mask. Since the creatures resemble the Xenomorph so much most of us are already familiar with the monster design. This obliterates all scariness and surprise moments since we already know what to expect.

In short, *A Quiet Place* is wasted potential. The simple yet interesting story could have made an atmospheric and captivating horror thriller, but unfortunately it was not able to live up to these hopes. It has a good start but loses suspense and most importantly logic after the first half an hour. As always, the audience is bombarded with jump scares which does not even give one the opportunity to be scared anymore. And the monster design being a rip-off takes the only left scare factor’s power of terrifying the audience. Maybe the sequel, which I have yet to watch, can make up for this disappointment. But for now, this movie will remain an average modern horror movie.

[1] <http://afilmadaybysonia.blogspot.com/2018/04/a-quiet-place-2018.html?m=1> April 9.
A Quiet Place 2018

[2] <http://afilmadaybysonia.blogspot.com/2018/04/a-quiet-place-2018.html?m=1> April 9.
A Quiet Place 2018

Full-Time Philosopher or Future Cab Driver?

By Jule Windeler

At the drugstore where I work part-time we sometimes get interns. Most of them are teenagers who have to do some kind of internship for school; the work is meant to “prepare them for their future” and to be a “valuable experience.” I guess teachers sometimes just need a break.

Today, a young girl is helping me stock the shelves with shower gel and nauseatingly sweet-smelling bath products. We don’t have much to say to each other, but we engage in the obligatory small talk anyway.

The girl frowns. I have just told her about university and the subjects I study: English and Philosophy. She lets out a nervous laugh; she probably expected me to say, “business administration” or “something with media.” Maybe she even hoped I’d say “law.” Then she could have replied with “cool, now I know where to find a lawyer if I ever need one.” I guess there is a slightly lower demand for philosophers.

“So...,” the girl says, “what do you do with that?” If I got a few bucks every time someone asked me that question, I wouldn’t even have to think about future job choices anymore. Most people don’t have a very distinct idea of philosophy; it is this abstract term that everyone has heard but never really thinks about. “It’s just something lazy students take in school for an easy A.” Some also start citing famous quotes, proud of remembering them: “*I know that I know nothing*. Wasn’t that Shakespeare?” Close. But there is one thing that everyone agrees upon and that every philosophy student hears at least once throughout their academic career: “Philosopher isn’t a real job. If you study philosophy, you’re just gonna end up as a cab driver.”

English, on the other hand, is something that most people at least have a concept of; that is, if I actually call it “English.” I have long since stopped using the actual name for my subject—“Anglophone Studies”—because a surprising number of people have responded with a confused “huh?” Once, the word “Anglistik” (which is German for “English studies”) was understood to be the official term for “German studies.” So, now I study “English.” Which leads to the next question, bound to come up in every conversation about my subjects: “So you’re studying to become a teacher?”

No. I specifically *don't* want to be a teacher, even though many people can't wrap their heads around that. "But children are so cute," they say. "Teaching is so rewarding." As a matter of fact, I spent an entire year working at a school, and that's how I know that teaching children is not for me. But, apparently, it is my only option (next to cab driving, of course). "What *else* are you going to do?" they say.

"I don't know yet," I usually reply, and then the other person gives me this look that is half shock and half pity. They think I am making a huge mistake. They think I am blindly following a path that leads nowhere. They are wrong.

I say "I don't know yet," not because there are no options. It's the opposite; there are too many options, and I haven't yet decided on one. Studying a language doesn't mean memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary. Instead, my studies mainly revolve around history, culture, and writing. And—one of my greatest passions—books. I could work as an editor for a publishing company, or I could go into journalism and write my own texts—about literature, for example. I could also work in translation, starting with user manuals and working my way up to translating bestselling novels. Or I could get a doctorate and start teaching university.

The girl's question still lingers in the air. "What do you do with that?" But I am tired of explaining. "I don't know yet," I say, skipping to the end of the conversation and earning another pitiful look for my mental collection. Only that I don't need her pity. I love what I'm doing; and if worse comes to worst, I can still start my own cab company.

When the Uterus Cleans up After a Failed Surprise Party

By Katharina Kalus

On a night of board games, childish laughter and deep talks, a friend of mine kindly acknowledged that he imagined menstruation as the uterus tearing down carefully selected decorations for the upcoming event of raising a little wonder of a human being. He sounded sad to think about failed surprise parties and the uterus's vain but time-consuming effort that goes unacknowledged. Indeed, the uterus does tidy up after a failed party, but nobody specifically asked for a celebration and there is no surprising effect, since the party gets thrown month after month. The uterus seems to be a possessive and annoyingly persistent organ which does not take no for an answer and keeps causing biologically female bodies pain and an overflow of confusing hormones.

Even though I was very glad to hear about my friend's attempt to dive into the world of blood flows, his way of turning the menstruation cycle into an amusing story causes false assumptions of the opposite biological gender. It is not a saddening story of a uterus being misunderstood. It is a serious matter of a monthly, painful, emotionally draining, and physically tiring cycle that should not be underestimated.

Although not all human beings without a uterus think alike, some of them will probably dispute my claim that people with a menstruating body have to deal with certain disadvantages in life. Due to painful cramps and hormones that cause mood swings and unpredictable, emotionally driven ways of behaving or reacting, people call menstruating women moody bitches and other insulting terms. When they do, menstruating women are not being treated with respect.

A quick scroll through social media and statements like "periods aren't that painful, pull yourselves together, women" or "my girlfriend forgot a tampon on my toilet – gross" of non-menstruating people are being presented. First of all, if a person does not have a uterus, they do not experience the actual pain of a period and, therefore, do not get to have a say in this at all. To keep it short: No uterus, no opinion. Everything else can only be claimed as pure exploitation of dominance. Secondly, to portray a tampon as gross indicates either the amount of ignorance or lack of knowledge some people embody regarding the topic of menstruation, its side effects, and hygiene products. I cannot fully blame said people for maintaining false assumptions since experiences and medical facts all around periods are not being talked about

enough to replace them with the actual truth. Even in television commercials or internet advertisements for hygienic products, women on their period are portrayed as energetic human beings who want to conquer the world. The uncensored truth is, menstruating experiences are fairly individual and come in several variations. But if there is one thing menstruation does not accomplish, it is for menstruating human beings to feel the urge to conquer the world energetically. Instead, menstruation makes people want to dive into a warm bed and hide from all sorts of chores and tasks.

After all, to say it in my friend's words, the uterus keeps up the good work of trying to make a home for a potential wonder of a new life, keeps hoping for a party, and continues to tear down all those carefully selected decorations after no baby takes up residence. However, I do hope that society will talk more openly about periods, blood flows, painful cramps, hygienic products, and all sorts of paraphernalia surrounding menstruation. Hopefully, this will help to raise awareness and educate those who know nothing about what it feels like dealing with a uterus, in order for menstruation to be understood as the natural phenomenon it actually is.

Short Story

Persecution

By Tristan Schartel

He was out of shape. Maybe he should have listened to his online community and followed the new trend: fitness. But there was no time to reflect on whey protein shakes and weight lifting. He needed to run. *Fast*. Although every part of his body told him not to because his stomach was shaking the Mexican fast-food he gobbled for lunch.

“Stop, you bastard!” he shouted, gasping for air. Detective Pac was chasing one of the lead cyber criminalists in town whom he just knew by his online identity: {PROteus}. “Running won’t help you. Our whole squad is after you. Better stop now!” Pac shouted. He wanted to utter more, but there was not more than a squeak. {PROteus} was about 200 metres away, but he seemed to be in a better physical condition than Pac.

Suddenly, everything around Pac seemed to fade away. The challenging sprint through the streets of this rather ugly neighbourhood was too much. He tumbled on the sidewalk, feeling a sudden ache in his knees. His head slammed the ground. The detective noticed the shadow of {PROteus}, vanishing in the late afternoon sun and blacked out when he sensed the warmth of blood kissing his cheek.

WASTED.

The bold red printed letters on the TV screen angered him every time he jumped too far into the online world of his video game console. He had failed the mission to catch this criminal. Again. It was a new game, a mixture of detective story, shooter and survival, on first rank of the video game charts since... he couldn’t even remember. It struck into the gaming charts just like lightning. The producers created a marvellous masterpiece with an open online world. A second life. THE opportunity to start anew. Virtual.

He restarted at his last saved slot and tried the mission of persecution again. In the world created by big minds behind big screens he wanted justice and success. Pressing buttons on

his gamepad, his mind was focused on the game. He wasn't in his one-room apartment in Hunts Point in the Big Apple anymore. The game sucked him in so much that the dirty dishes, his stinky shirt and leftovers of a burrito on his kitchen table were not in his field of interest. He was in another world. Another sphere.

But suddenly, he heard someone knocking excessively. "NYPD. OPEN THE DAMN DOOR. YOU'RE ARRESTED!" someone was shouting on the other side of the door. The knocking got louder. "WE KNOW YOU ARE IN THERE. THE BUILDING IS SURROUNDED. THERE IS NO WAY TO ESCAPE. NYPD. OPEN THE DOOR. NOW!"

He needed a moment to return to reality. "They are here," he thought. Panicking he threw the gamepad on the ground and rushed towards his desktop PC. He heard someone trying to open the door. There wasn't much time left. He unplugged the USB flash drive from his computer and darted into the bathroom. The moment he shut the bathroom door he heard his apartment door burst open. "WE KNOW YOU ARE HERE. NYPD. YOU ARE ARRESTED!" He locked the bathroom door and opened the window which led directly to the fire exit.

Climbing through the window, he wondered if it had been the best idea to include the rusty fire ladder in his escape plan. Yet it was the only way to escape. He checked his pockets for the flash drive. It was still there. "In certain fields this tiny miracle is priceless," he thought. "Not to mention its possible consequences for society..." He went down the ladder, finally reaching the empty side alley consisting of rubbish and a few stray cats. He knew the house was not surrounded. The local police surely wouldn't deploy the majority of their staff for a simple arrest, especially not in this area where crimes were committed every five minutes. He sprinted down the side alley away from his place. Away from police. Far away from responsibilities running as fast as he could. He was out of shape. Maybe he should have listened to his online community and followed the new trend: fitness.

Poetry

To a friend

By Friederike Felderhoff

Having a chance
To enjoy the dance
And spend time with ye
'cause when you're with friends,
You're in glad company

Nowhere
Is there
Something better to do
Than at a place
Where you try something new

With someone beside you
Who gives and takes too

Eternal Lovers

By Friederike Felderhoff

You are the one
I'm lit for
You are the one
I need
You are the one
to take over –
but I am the one
in the lead.

We stay together
Each moment
We stay together –
we kiss
we stay together forever
we stay together
in bliss

You are so dark
While I'm bright
In being divided –
We're one
You are my lover
The Shadow –
I am your lover.
The Sun

Embracing Sparks

By Friederike Felderhoff

Only the pieces of a puzzle
Words –
Phrases and ideas
Places formed
In the back of my mind
Where they were lingering for years
With new approaches
And inspirations
Now come together
To form a story

Recipes

Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake

By Elisa John

Aunt Marga was a terrible person. She was miserly and rude and my great-grandmother's sister-in-law. And let us be honest, everyone knows that sisters-in-law are to be taken with a pinch of salt. According to my elderly relatives, my family rather celebrated than mourned her loss when she passed away. So, one could truly say that the name resemblance to Harry Potter's aunt Marge is not without reason.

This is one of the two things I know about this infamous woman even though I have never had the pleasure (or the distress, depending on how one views it) of meeting her. The second thing is that she was the creator of the most outstandingly delicious cherry cake existing. In, well, loving memory of her, my family named this cake Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake.

Now, if the chance of surprisingly finding a pit in one's slice of the cake (which means good luck) is not reason enough to love any cherry cake, people will argue that it is more than easy to find good, if not excellent recipes for cherry cakes. They are everywhere – on the internet, on the cooking channel on TV, learned by heart and passed on from ancestor to ancestor by tradition and written in every second cook book in the forgotten piles of books in people's cellars. The world does not need another recipe that claims to be the best out of them all, right?

However, this time, it is true; this cake is the best one. All these other already existing recipes might be lovely but not one of them holds the same message as Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake. This message is that even the worst things can turn into something great. The worst of human beings can still leave something good behind. Just like this despised woman blessed this world with the best cherry cake that now brings the whole family together whenever something is celebrated.

When looking at my recipe for the one and only Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake, there are exactly six steps that make this cake stand out from other people's recipes for any other baked goods. Some of these steps are debatable, some of them are not, but I can ensure that only by

following these steps one can create a cake that truly lives up to the meaning of the message Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake stands for. Here are my inevitably essential steps to prepare and bake Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake.

List of ingredients:

- 250g butter
 - 250g sugar
 - 150g flour
 - 100g grated chocolate
 - 5 large eggs
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 - grated lemon zest of one lemon
 - one glass jar of pitted sour cherries (ca. 680g)
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- Firstly, one should separate the eggs into egg yolks and egg whites. Afterwards, one should beat the egg whites. The beaten egg whites should be folded in as the last step of preparing the dough. This is the only way to make the cake light and fluffy.
 - Secondly, after blending the butter and sugar, one should add the egg yolks.
 - Thirdly, grated chocolate, cinnamon, flour, baking soda and grated lemon zest should be added. Here, one should definitely make sure to not be lazy but instead to use a real lemon and not any kind of lemon aroma. Only a real lemon can provide rich and authentic taste.
 - Fourthly, one should only ever use pitted morello cherries or any other sort of sour cherries. This is probably the most surprising step for most people. Actually, a lot of baking enthusiasts or enthusiasts of indulging in all sorts of cakes swear by using simple and fresh cherries because they are sweeter. But even if needing the remaining juice in the morello cherry glass was not necessary for the final step, the morello cherries would be the better choice. Cherries have a lower acidity as sour cherries. The higher the fruit acidity, the more suitable it is for any baking purposes.
 - Fifthly, one should bake the cake for 45 minutes in a preheated oven.
 - Sixthly, after the cake has cooled down, one should slowly pour the cherry juice that remained in the glass over the cake. This step throws off the majority of people who come across this cake. Most of them are afraid the cake will end up being a mushy shadow of what it could have been, had they just kept their hands off the attempt to pour cherry juice over it. However, giving in to that fear will make those people's cake be as dry as the desert. They will also end up with a cake that could never have a taste as strongly and a consistency as juicy as Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake. Also, the results of daring this step are always the first thing people compliment as soon as they try this masterpiece of a cake.

Anyway, the great taste and the message Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake holds are not even what I love most about this cake. It is that this message can be applied to any bad situation. Whether it is a blessing in disguise, hard times that make one grow and learn, the one rejection that leads one to finding their dream job or an ongoing global pandemic that brings back all the bittersweet memories of the times I was able to eat cherry cake surrounded by my family – Aunt Marga's Cherry Cake and its meaning cover them all. And I know for sure that the meaning of this cake will also always be a silver lining for those who have not yet been able to find the good in the bad.

Recipes for Aspiring Writers

By Melissa Knox-Raab

For aspiring writers, few things could be better than miserable or even terrifying moments, moments like those many of us have experienced in pandemic times. Turning life's lemons into lemonade is never easy, but here are *five tips for aspiring writers*:

(1) Keep a handwritten journal by your bedside and write in it when you wake up—especially when you wake up at four a.m.

(2) Carry around a little notebook to capture any thought you imagine you're going to remember later—you won't. A cell phone will do, but there's something about the little notebook that inspires. David Sedaris [has an amusing essay](#) on this, on which he elaborates [here](#).

(3) Write a set amount daily; 600-800 words is a good goal.

(4) Never judge what you are writing as you write. Dreams, rages, moments of despair—dump those thoughts in your journal. Enjoy whining. You can often turn a temper tantrum into an intriguing train of thought when you've cooled down.

(5) Borrow from writers who appeal to you in order to make something of that hodgepodge in your journal. Wordsworth thought of poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,” but Coleridge, whose poetry often fit that description, offered another formula: “emotion recollected in tranquility.” I find both methods useful. The French writer Jules Renard remarked: “Look for the ridiculous in everything and you will find it.” He's right.

You've got to keep up your strength while writing. Here's a fun one. You'll need a wok. All items can be purchased at the Asian store near the university at Viehofer Platz:

- Rice noodles
- Soy sauce
- Sesame oil
- Peanut oil
- Black rice vinegar
- Shao Hsing Rice wine
- Spicy black bean sauce
- Tofu

- A chili pepper or two, depending on how hot you like your food
- Crushed garlic—lots
- Grated ginger—as much as you like
- Sesame seeds
- Sugar
- Cornstarch
- Vegetables of your choice—bok choy and snow peas are some good choices

(1) Cut and drain the tofu. Place on clean kitchen towels and cover.

(2) Wash and slice vegetables.

(3) Sprinkle a little cornstarch over the tofu.

Put about two tablespoons of peanut oil in the hot wok. Add tofu as soon as the oil is hot; let fry on high heat for a few minutes and then turn over. When it looks crispy, remove and set on paper towels to drain.

Add a little more peanut oil to the pan. Stir in crushed garlic, grated ginger, and vegetables. Stir fry for a few minutes. Remove from heat. Add tofu.

Throw a package of rice noodles into boiling, salted water. Depending on how thick they are, they'll need five to ten minutes. Follow package instructions. Drain, rinse, and add to the vegetables and tofu in the wok.

In a small saucepan, combine about a half a cup of the rice wine, a tablespoon or two of the black rice vinegar, a shake or three of the sesame oil, about third of a cup of soy sauce, several tablespoons of the black bean sauce, a chopped chili or two, and a tablespoon or more of sugar. Put on high heat, stirring, and when it's just boiling, pour it over your rice-tofu-veggie mixture. Sprinkle on a handful of sesame seeds.

Enjoy.

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