



"One Day in May"

(May 15, 2021)

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Name: Sarah McNair Vosmeier

Class year:

Connection to the College (student? faculty? alum? friend of the College?):

faculty

Describe your day on May 15, 2021.

Tell us whatever you'd like at whatever length you'd like. We think future students will especially appreciate hearing about concrete details -- What can you see and hear from where you are right now? What did you do for fun today? Did you cook or eat anything special? Did you work or do chores? Who did you spend time with? What did you learn?

May 15 was a lovely spring day, and I enjoyed taking a break to wander around campus. It was nice to chat briefly with the members of the drumline. Their sound carries across the campus, so I've been hearing them practicing or performing for a while now, even back when the weather was pretty cold. One of the things about our pandemic life is that it's hard to know what other people are doing -- I'm not sure how the rest of the musicians are practicing or performing, but it's been nice to hear the drumline and know that the music program is still carrying on.

I might have spent more time outdoors except that I had so many things to prepare for Monday. Back in the summer, when we were setting up the schedule of classes for this "year like no other," I decided not to offer the course I would have otherwise offered this spring term. It's on the history of photography, with a lot of time spent in the archives with the whole class gathered around small objects, and I wasn't sure I could teach it in a way that would be both safe and intellectually satisfying. Instead of the photography course, I decided to team-teach an American history survey with my husband, Matthew Vosmeier. I'm responsible for next week's content, and I still have a lot of decisions to make about what we'll be talking about.

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What do you think you'll remember most about surviving the pandemic?

Tell us what whatever you'd like at whatever length you'd like. We think future students will especially appreciate memories that help them picture your life and relationships -- Have you taken up any new leisure activities in the last year, or have you changed how you eat, or cook? If you're on campus, what was it like in classrooms or dining spaces or locker rooms or offices? Have you been able to stay in touch with family or friends (including classmates and other Hanoverians)? How? What have you missed the most in the past year?

I think what I'm likely to remember most about the pandemic is how much time I spent on the phone. I checked in with far-flung loved ones every day, occasionally calling five households in one day. That added up to a fair bit of time on the phone! But I hope it contributed to keeping us all sane and healthy.

I've noticed the word "languishing" in the media lately -- to describe the mental/emotional experience of the pandemic. It's a substitute for "depression" -- for an experience that's like depression but wouldn't be diagnosed that way. "Languishing" doesn't seem quite right to me, but I'm not sure what word would be better -- maybe something closer to "exhaustion." At least among people I interact with, we haven't had the kind of dramatic crises that make you cry or scream, but the relatively small problems and the free-floating anxiety have been unrelenting and exhausting.

I've kept a store of peanut M&Ms in the house as comfort food for when things have been darkest or most frustrating. I don't have any in the house right now, and I wonder if I've replenished my supply for the last time. All my loved ones are fully vaccinated now, and the CDC has released fully vaccinated people from needing to wear masks in most public spaces. It's hard to believe that it might be nearly over, but maybe it is. . .

I've appreciated the ways others have sustained and supported us all. I've even been genuinely touched by institutional and commercial gestures (companies offering free games or educational opportunities, for instance). Back in August, the Chaplain offered an "Interreligious Service of Screaming into the Void," written by alumna Jenaba Waggy. Although I didn't attend the service, I appreciated the text. (I've appended it here.) About that same time, the alumni office gave each faculty and staff member a voucher for coffee and a treat from the Underground, in recognition of the difficulties we'd all had getting the term underway. It would have been great to chat with a colleague over coffee, instead of taking it back to my office, but it felt good to have a treat that acknowledged all our collective efforts. Then, after the weather got cold, Parkhurst set up a giant soup pot outside the Campus Center and gave away bowls of soup to anyone walking by. The soup was great, and I was warmed as much by the gesture as by the soup.

An Interreligious Service of Screaming into the Void

August 2020

Participants gather on the steps of the Point

Call to screaming

One: It is too much, we say to the fog that rolls off the river, it is too much.

Many: It is too much, and the fog does not answer.

One: It is too much, we say to the stones that fall down to the river, it is too much.

Many: It is too much, and the stones do not pause.

One: It is too much, we say to the salamanders that chase the birds to the river, it is too much.

Many: It is too much, and with the salamanders and the birds we come to add our voices that the stones and the fog and the river shall hear we cannot, will not bear more.

Invocation

Leader: Blessed be the Earth who is also fed up with this shit; blessed be the skies that open wide arms to receive our frustration; blessed be the creatures who wish we would get our shit together; blessed be we who are weary and in need of rest. May the strength of a universe whose stars move without our permission and whose galaxies shine whether we see them or not hold us steady on this planet of ours.

Inhale

Leader: In this space made holy by its sheer existence when all things seem to be falling into nothingness, we gather. We are wondrous creations, made for sound by the marvel of lungs, diaphragms, vocal chords, mouths, hearts, and minds. In this time of feeling overwhelmed, let us take this moment to inhale, to feel the air strengthening us within, and to scream our fears into the vastness that can hold them.

Participants take one to two deep breaths and then scream as much as is necessary, preferably pointed toward the river but in whichever way allows them to vent the frustration of the current world structures. The Leader allows for the screams to die down before beginning again.

Exhale

Leader: In the emptiness, we refill not with the anger or the fear or the disbelief or the shock, for we have given these things to the firmament and the firmament shall hold them. In the emptiness, be free of the stupidity of others, of the expectations of yourself, of the anxiety of all who do not recognize basic decency. In this breath, be present to the way you are here, only here, throat tingling and lungs refilling as the sound of our fury dissipates. There will be things that are not fixed and people who are not held accountable, but they are not here in this heartbeat, or this, or this.

Benediction

One: The world is still broken.

Many: But we, for this moment, are mended.

One: The world is still ignorant.

Many: But we, for this moment, are aware.

One: The world is still overwhelming.

Many: But we, for this moment, are free. May peace follow our steps as we get it wrong, get it right, and ask for what to do next. May we remember the power of our voice and use it well in the spaces that try to silence us.

One: Depart in hope, knowing that it cannot be silenced even by the loudest of voices.

Many: May it be so.