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Editor's Notebook

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EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

Sarah Wiggins and Norma Anderson

In 2022, *Bridgewater Review* enters its fortieth year. After the difficulties of these past two years, it is heartening to have something to cheer. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the magazine had been postponed since the fall 2020 semester. We welcome its spring 2022 return.

The magazine's postponement was a reminder of how important our publication has been for the BSU community. For forty years, *Bridgewater Review* has served as an outlet for the discussion of our research and teaching. In an earlier editorial, I quoted Michael Kryzanek from the founding issue, and it bears repeating that *Bridgewater Review* is "a publication that is informative, timely, and thought-provoking" (May-June 1982). What better time than now, in a major pandemic that has altered our educational experience, to bring those qualities forward and continue the tradition? When faced with great difficulty and isolation, we must share our findings together, preserve our sense of community, and record our voices for posterity to let future generations understand an important episode in the university's history.

The pandemic has interrupted our lives personally and academically. We all have our individual experiences. From the abrupt shift to online teaching in spring 2020, to fully online the following academic year, to an in-person return to the classroom where health and safety needed to be ensured, the weight of the pandemic has been felt by faculty, staff, and students. Some, or perhaps all of us, have worried for the safety of loved ones, observed societal fissures, and contemplated the effects of climate change. We have been in a state of mourning for different reasons and are left questioning whether we are facing an "it gets better" or a "how will I adapt" situation.

I have coped with pandemic anxieties in a variety of ways, including playing music, adopting cats (yes, more than one), watching period costume dramas, and maintaining a daily dose of Wordle. Such small things have been necessary because my past two years have been driven by fear and significant isolation. As my partner has MS, the potential danger of Covid is a daily reality. Those examples of escapism bring moments of happiness but are not enough to soothe the emotional burdens that bring me back to reality every time I mask-up. Those burdens follow me to the classroom and the return to in-person classes proved difficult. It left me wondering how other faculty were handling their mental health (which is addressed in this issue by the research of Norma Anderson and Kimberly Fox). While I normally imagine myself a rock for my students, I have felt like a puddle.

After learning of the passing of the scholar, bell hooks, I revisited her book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, which made an impression during my early years at BSU. Her line, "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy," is still moving (12). Reading hooks again made me think about how I want to shape the intellectual environment in my classroom when the physical environment is beyond my control. While the ship remains unsteady and its destination unpredictable, at least I can try to make things meaningful for the inhabitants

of my small cabin. Her words were restorative and hopeful.

The return of our faculty magazine is another welcome restoration. For this issue, the editors invited faculty and librarians to submit essays related to the realities of the past two years. As expected, the pandemic takes center stage. Some faculty have taken a reflective approach and address the importance of looking back on their experience. Others have contributed research that outlines how individuals have faced the consequences of Covid, focusing on both elementary and higher education. The pandemic is also addressed from a pedagogical perspective in terms of how we engage our students in class discussion, as well as how a study abroad course could be modified due to travel restrictions. We are also reminded that these past years were not just mired in the pandemic, as social justice issues have remained significant. Two articles address issues of social/racial justice both locally and nationally. Put together, the articles in this issue help us to contemplate what we have endured and what we can do to make things better in our academic and local communities.

The editors are pleased that the magazine resumed in time to honor the academic and artistic career of our colleague, Stephen Smalley. His fifty years with Bridgewater State University is a monumental milestone, and his love of teaching BSU students is another reminder of what we hope to achieve in our classrooms and beyond. Congratulations, Steve!



Sarah Wiggins is Professor in the Department of History.

Standing outside a nursing home window one chilly day in early December 2020, I watched my dad being settled into his Hospice bed; he had just decided to stop fighting his overwhelming cancer. He smiled and waved at my daughter and me, our faces pressed against the glass, raising our voices so he could hear our hellos.

A couple moments later, my mother entered the room, scooting her wheelchair along with slipper-clad feet. She glanced over my daughter and me, eyes only for my dad, eager to re-enter the caregiver mode that defined her life for so many years.

She'd been admitted to the nursing home ten months earlier; she and my dad hadn't been together in a room since March. Married sixty-four years, they too had been separated by glass since lockdown began. From my outsider position, and literally outside, I watched their reunion wondering what they were feeling; together again, but possibly less joyful given the circumstances.

In January 2021, two weeks after my dad passed away, and right as spring classes were resuming, my daughter and I stood outside my mother's window, watching her gasp for air. It was just before the vaccine could help, her nursing home was riddled with the virus, and she, after weeks of sitting with my dying father, exhausting herself, had contracted Covid.

My mother was hard of hearing so screaming through the glass was a losing proposition to begin with. At that point, though, exhaust fans labored loudly in every room to create zero-pressure environments, and she could hear nothing. So we stood at her window, frigid, pantomiming and holding up notebooks with giant marker-scrawled messages on each succeeding page. "Please try to eat," "We're healthy, don't worry," "We love

you," never really knowing if she could read them, but thankful she knew we were there.

For my family, the pandemic was one long agony. Covid itself wasn't the cause (my mom, somehow, recovered, only to pass away *this* January)—it was maneuvering within pandemic regulations which made it impossible to comfort and care for my parents in any normal way that created the greatest heartache.

It is a strange thing to experience, being physically separate from loved ones, knowing your time with someone so important is short, watching them weakening but being unable to offer any physical comfort. And still, I'm grateful we could at least see each other.

The pandemic provided me a lot of time to contemplate windows and obstacles, observing lives and pain behind glass, trying to connect with and understand others' experiences through barriers.

This issue of the *Bridgewater Review* is our first in two years. I have deeply missed putting together this magazine, which allows faculty to present our own work, to connect with each other, and to share it with a broader BSU community.

As we have put together this issue, the sense of relief I've felt may be somewhat hard to explain; reading people's work, thinking through contributors' ideas, and trying to understand their perspectives and creations, allow us to value and celebrate one of the fundamental

purposes of academia—research. And that feels particularly important right now.

I'm a social scientist; my interests are in people and institutions. But whether it's at the level of a cell, an individual mind, a government, or a galaxy, all research is geared to understanding something in a new way, to increasing our knowledge, to getting a better sense of reality. And it challenges us.

Research doesn't always solve problems and it's certainly not always comforting. It doesn't allow us to know Truth, full stop. Just like the windows that kept me separated from my parents, unable to touch them and offer material comfort, research doesn't allow us to experience others' embodied realities. And yet it does provide a window. It does allow us to see more than we did before and more than we would without it.

As I learned through my own research project in the early pandemic, BSU faculty and staff worked tirelessly on behalf of students and each other, frequently overrode their own needs and worries, and also rarely received recognition for their commitment.

This magazine is one miniscule way we can acknowledge the hard work of faculty. We can connect, through ideas, to each other and to knowledge previously unconsidered. To me, this magazine provides a vital opportunity to connect across distance and experience, to give voice to faculty interests and celebrate each other by doing so.



Norma Anderson is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology.