

PERSPECTIVE

The Hill We Climb

By AMANDA GORMAN

When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade
We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished
We the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one
And yes we are far from polished
far from pristine
but that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect
We are striving to forge a union with purpose
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious

Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division
Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promised glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy
And this effort very nearly succeeded
But while democracy can be periodically delayed
it can never be permanently defeated
In this truth
in this faith we trust
For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves
So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,

benevolent but bold,
fierce and free
We will not be turned around
or interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next generation
Our blunders become their burdens
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might,
and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy
and change our children's birthright
So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,
we will rise from the windswept northeast
where our forefathers first realized revolution
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,
we will rise from the sunbaked south
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the shade,
afire and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it

Amanda Gorman, 22, the youngest inaugural poet, delivered a reading of her poem at the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Gorman is the first person to be named national youth poet laureate, a distinction she achieved as a 19-year-old sophomore at Harvard University.

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How Covid Fog created its own strange reality

By FRANK PARTSCH

In the paperwork accompanying my hospital discharge from the Covid ward was the opportunity to honor a nurse.
An award had been established by the family of a young man who had died some time ago in the care of a wonderful nurse. Based on essays by patients from time to time, a winning nurse would receive a trophy and the nurses on her floor would get a party.
I could do that.
No, it turned out, I couldn't do that.
In the Covid ward, the nurses are unrecognizable — masked, shielded and shrouded in plastic that often obscures their name tag. They come and go in twos and threes, all professional, all pleasant, most very adept at joshing the old guy in to a smile. He can't distinguish one from another. He tries to fix them in his mind. He asks their names. They tell him. Gina. Terry. Katie. Daria. And he forgets immediately as their words dissolve into the Fog of Covid that has infiltrated his brain. Eventually he gives up and pretends he knows them all.
The Fog of Covid, for me, came strongest with the nightfall. It scrambled my thoughts and created an alternate reality. I had a visit from an old Black preacher who praised the craft of editorial writing and prayed for my salvation. I overheard my kids partying outside my room, and I resented the possibility that they would eat the ice cream I had left in the fridge. And I got, or thought I got, into heated arguments with hospital staff. I'd wake up worried about whether I had blown my standing as a patient.
A nurse whose name sounded like "Chesney" came to my rescue. She was a force of nature. When she flung open the door of my room and called out, "Good morning, Frank," the sun seemed to have decided to rise. The last wisps and tendrils of the Covid Fog swirled back to their vile containers. The line between reality and the other place was re-established. I asked if I had said anything

Maybe it was Jaime whom I thanked for being a voice in the night. Maybe it was someone else entirely. Maybe it didn't happen at all. COVID-19 robs wordsmith of ability to separate delusion from reality.

inappropriate overnight. I already knew the answer. She replied, "Of course not."
Once she said she was sad that I was afflicted by the Fog. I said, "Thank you for being a voice in the night."
In the daytime, on some days, was Jaime. She combated the Fog with her sweetness. Busy as the Covid nurses were, Jaime always had an extra moment to convey friendliness. She teased, bantered and once even laughed at a joke I attempted. She was inherently supportive and reassuring. She literally brought sunshine to my part of the ward.
Can't do this, though. Can't work with the Fog of Covid. I can't be sure whose was the voice in the night — whether Jaime or Chesney or some other nurse whose name I have forgotten. Can't be sure it was Jaime, or someone else who laughed at my attempted joke. I have to consider that parts of her sparkling personality were crafted in my Covid-addled mind. I'm not even sure of Chesney's name.
I tried to frame an essay in a way that focused on the nurses as a group, using Jaime and Chesney as symbols of professionalism without attributing to them particular words or actions. It didn't work. Not fair to them. Too many opportunities for me to be caught getting it wrong.
Maybe it was Jaime whom I thanked for being a voice in the night. Maybe it was someone else entirely. Maybe it didn't happen at all. That's how I've got to see it.

Frank Partsch is a retired editorial page editor of The Omaha (Nebraska) World-Herald.

Lost education of the pandemic generation

How far are students falling behind as a result of the ongoing pandemic and how will they ever catch up?
For years, as the editorial page editor, I have met with the leaders of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education to discuss issues of educational policy. Trying to narrow the gap between the educational opportunities available to students in the state's urban centers as compared to its more affluent suburbs, and figuring out how to pay for increasing special-education services without detracting from other programs, have been perennial topics.
Unfortunately, there has not been much progress in meeting those challenges over those years. Now, layered upon those existing problems, is the COVID-19 crisis. The CABE officials the editorial board met with last week — virtually, of course — conceded they still don't know how this will all play out, never mind how all the lost learning time can be made up.
For much of last year public schools largely shutdown as students moved to remote learning and school administrations and teachers figured out on the fly how to do it. This year many schools are using a hybrid model — students in school some days, learning from home others — while a few have managed to remain fully open for in-school instruction.
At various times, however, many schools have had to go fully remote for periods, either because of an increased COVID threat exposure or for a lack of available teachers and substitutes.
Teaching and learning



PAUL CHOINIERE
p.choiniere@theday.com

cannot be easy under such circumstances. How well will elementary school students be prepared for the leap to middle school, or for middle schoolers to step up to the demands of high school? How will high schoolers apply for and function at the university level? How many high schoolers will drop out because they feel so overwhelmed when they return to regular classes?
The consequences are most severe for low-income and minority children, who were less likely to have the necessary computer technology when remote learning began. While many school systems have made great efforts to distribute the needed equipment, access to high-speed internet to make it work can also be a big problem for low-income families.
Adding to the challenge for some of these students is that, living in a household where English is a second language, they were already struggling with language and remote learning worsens the problem. In households with parents can't work at home, supervision to assure learning is getting done can be an issue.
How far might some students be falling behind? Researchers at Stanford University evaluated standardized test scores across

the country after last year's lost school year and concluded the average student had lost a third of a year to a full year's worth of learning in reading, about three-quarters of a year to more than a year in math.
Patrice McCarthy, deputy director and general counsel at CABE, suspects that the differences in lost learning from student to student will be dramatic, with some having been able to keep up on their studies and others having effectively missed a year of instruction — and counting.
Ideally, students will have to be assessed individually and plans developed to bring them back to grade level, McCarthy said. The school systems with the most needs are the ones that can least afford to provide such remedial instruction, meaning it will take an infusion of federal and state dollars.
Summer school, in some cases for all students, could be required, but would also create its own set of problems. Some schools are not air conditioned, particularly in poorer communities, and finding staffing and covering the costs would not be easy.
Certainly, after the elderly, getting teachers and older students vaccinated should be a high priority. In addition to detracting from education, remote learning effects the ability of many parents to retain jobs or find them.
What happens to the COVID generation of students will be one of the stories that will continue to play out from the pandemic of 2020-2021.

Paul Choiniere is the editorial page editor.