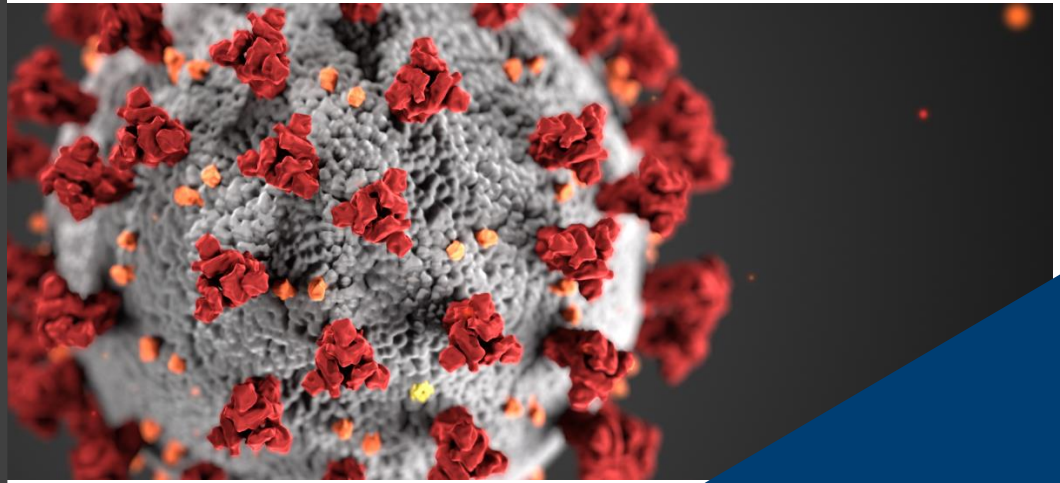


IN THE
TIME
OF
COVID-19

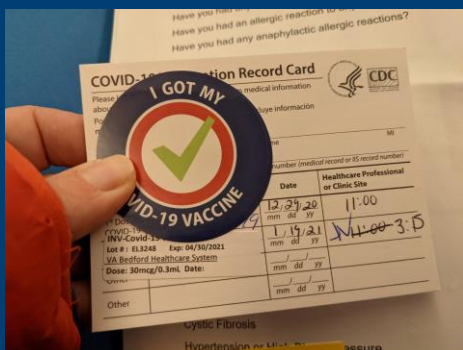


WELCOME

This is CHOIR's collective effort for expressing and documenting our extraordinary, lived experiences in the time of COVID-19. This is the first issue in Volume 2 of our effort. To view past issues, visit: [https://www.choir.research.va.gov/research/Products and Publications/covid.asp](https://www.choir.research.va.gov/research/Products%20and%20Publications/covid.asp)

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The nurse was excited. I was experiencing all of my 2020 emotions simultaneously. Relief in seeing an end to the pandemic, but guilt in knowing my higher risk Mother and Mother-in-Law still await their vaccines.

ANONYMOUS

(Stir) Crazy (to the tune of Crazy by Patsy Cline)

I'm crazy, crazy from working without you
Stir crazy, as I crawl from my bed to my desk

I know, you're working as hard as you can now
But meanwhile, your dog is now leading the call.

Worry, why should I make myself worry
Wondering, what in the world I should do, now

Crazy, we've been apart so many months now
Crazy from working in closets in bathrooms
To get quiet from family too

Crazy, crazy from virtual people
Crazy from teaming and webex and zooming
Crazy and missing all of you.

BARBARA BOKHOUR

**#COVIDCREATIVITY
@VA_CHOIR ON TWITTER**

Nog, Nog, Noggin' on Heaven's Door

Mama get that Turkey offa' me
I can't eat it anymore.

I'd take a novelty-adult-December-beverage... or maybe three

Feel I'm egg-noggin' on heaven's door....

Nog nog noggin' on heaven's door
Nog nog noggin' on heaven's door
Nog nog noggin' on heaven's door
Nog nog noggin' on heaven's door....

All this-Hanukkah-Christmas-Kwanza, confusin' me...
Is there one holiday, or four?
I know a whole lotta people, put up a tree
Then they start noggin on heaven's door...

Nog-nog-noggin' on heaven's door (x4)

I want all CHOIR singin' carols here with me

Cuz damn my throat is gettin' sore
I ate a lotta latkes, cake and brie
All mixed with nog... and I'm goin' for more.

Nog-nog-noggin' on heaven's door (x4)

ALLEN GIFFORD



The pandemic and spring came together so, looking for color, I started pressing flowers, a pastime of my late Polish grandmother. Her end of life journey with brain cancer in 2000 both inspired my interest in health services and ruptured my mom's relationship with her siblings. I've recently reconnected with my mom's family and catalyzed some healing. Compelled by the paradoxes of family-strangers, together-apart, and death-life in preserved flora and memories of my grandma, I created these gifts from my dried flowers for maternal cousins who eloped in October 2019 and April 2020, respectively: a *Princess Bride* inspired composition for harpist Lauren and new husband Wesley in Georgia, and a Smoky Mountain campsite for cousin Benjamin and new wife Olivia, new homeowners in Tennessee. Materials: thrifted vellum paper, secondhand floating wood frames, PVA white glue, pressed flowers, inspiration from Grandma, and love.

RACHEL RIENDEAU

ON NAMES: AN INAUGURATION REFLECTION

On the morning of the Presidential Inauguration, I read the following in Yahoo News (an oxymoron?), which was not new news to anyone: “President-elect Joe Biden has fathered four children from two marriages — though tragically only two are still alive today. Mr Biden had three children with his first wife, Neilia Biden, whom he married in 1966. In order of birth, they were Joseph Robinette III, known as Beau; Robert Hunter; and Naomi Christina, known as Amy.”

Upon reading this old news again, I had a new thought: this Catholic family from Delaware was more like my Hindu Indian family than I ever realized.

Indians have no need for first names. They are a formality; required, given, but rarely used. My own first name, Anashua, was never a name I was intended to be called. Rani, my middle name, was my real name from the beginning. My brother, David Devdutta, fared worse. He was called Raj (king), a nickname, presumably to go with Rani (queen), for all of his childhood and adolescence. When he went to college, he demanded to be known as Dave. My youngest brother, John Shantanu, somehow escaped this tradition. My thesis is that John is also the name of my non-Indian mother’s father, and my mother put her foot down and insisted the first name stick. This is also something Indians don’t do—they do not name people after others. Still, I give my mother credit for her win on this. My Indian grandmother tried to give John the nickname Lal (red), but it was a no-go. Luckily for me, her nickname for me also didn’t last. Nothing will send your friends into hysterics more than your grandmother loudly calling “Kuku (sweet)! Kuku Rani!” to dinner.

My grandparents lived in Kolkata, and we would not see them for many years. But when they did visit the U.S., they stayed for 6-18 months. During this time, I would listen to my grandparents call my father, who had only the first name Prateep, no middle name, by his nickname, “Bunny”. My middle-aged father, an electrical engineer, being called something fluffy and cuddly, was funny. But he was Bunny until my grandparents passed away. He never asked them to stop, despite the acculturation he experienced in the U.S. The nickname was non-negotiable.

Growing up in a small, Michigan town, on every first day of school I experienced both excitement and dread. Which friends would be in my class? How many times would I have to explain my name to my teacher? In elementary school, maybe once or twice on that first day of school. In middle school years and older, several times a day. All student roll calls were alphabetical. As the teacher got close to my last name, I would hold my breath; she or he would pause, and make an attempt at pronouncing Anashua. I would jump in, pronounce it correctly, and then say “but I go by Rani, you can call me that”. This conversation would inevitably follow: “How do you get Ronnie from Anashua?” “Rani is my middle name”, I would say. And then I would have to confirm the spelling and pronunciation of Rani. Or, the teacher would say, “Is Ronnie short for Veronica?”. “No”. I never understood that one, but it happened year after year.

When my husband Sherin, a German-Egyptian, and I, decided to have children, we agreed on one thing: usable first names. I love my culture, but the name issues were never fun. I dreamt of being called Cindy when I was younger. So, whatever names we gave our kids had to be ones they would be called, and they would be pronounceable by the average Western citizen. We gave them ethnic middle names, as a nod to our backgrounds. Now, years later, our son Ben, at the beginning of each semester, tells us how many other Bens are in his class. In his 4-person college advising group, 50% are Bens. When he lived on campus, there was a Ben on every floor of his dorm. There are Bens in his linguistics class, his Japanese class, and his classics class. He can’t get away from Bens. Our youngest daughter Charlotte had so many Charlottes in her preschool class that she was taught how to spell her first name with her last name initial, E. It took a very long time to un-teach her that her first name was not spelled “Charlottee”. Lucy, the oldest, is the only one who does not complain about her name. Maybe this is the norm. More people are unhappy with their names, than not?

Sadly, there is only one child alive from President Biden’s first marriage who we could talk to about this name issue. If I ever did meet Hunter Biden, I would absolutely ask him how he has felt being called by his middle name his entire life. Does he use his first name in his legal signature, and use his first name initial in his email signature, as I do? Does he remind colleagues to add his first initial to his name on any publication they are submitting? (joke). Or is he happy to just stick to Hunter and go along with the lifelong plan of forgetting he has a first name? Maybe he has never thought of this, but I’m not buying that. Maybe I’ll pose this question to Yahoo News to get at the truth.

A. RANI ELWY



My friend and I got outside our comfort zones and took an online art class to learn how to needle felt. It was fun and rewarding to transform piles of loose, colored wool roving into these chickadees and a catnip-filled mouse for my cat. While I enjoyed the entire process, the most rewarding thing about the felting was the pleasure of achieving a finished product within hours – productivity on a time scale we as researchers rarely experience. Inspired by one of the earlier *Creativity in the Time of COVID* issues, I've also been studying Italian and German to brush up my skills for the trip we were supposed to take last summer (and are now really hoping to take in 2021!). Trying new things helps me feel I am moving forward while I am stuck in place!

STEPHANIE SHIMADA



Just before COVID hit, Jenny Palmer and I had scheduled a double date for this folk show in Boston. Just like everything else, it was cancelled... and has now been rescheduled for February **2022**! Something to look forward to, and hopefully we'll all be vaccinated by then!

ANNA BARKER