

# **Love, Joy, and Intimacy: One Family's Response to 550 Days of Lockdown A Poem in 3 Voices**

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## Abstract

Two parents and their middle school aged child reflect back on 550 days of COVID-19 lockdown. Using a Poem in 3 Voices platform, each of them respond in conversation-style about their love of each other, their love of learning, and the joy and healing they found in common everyday things like reading, writing, cooking, music, and gardening. Their playful banter seeks to speak to the intimacy they intentionally built with each other during the pain of the pandemic and their unspeakable losses. The purpose of this aesthetic work is to illuminate that not all of lockdown was despair and that, in the midst of pain, there can also be moments of love, joy, and intimacy.

### **Key words:**

Family, Parenting, Intimacy, Joy, Grief (in order of importance)

**Love, Joy, and Intimacy:**

**One Family's Response to 550 Days of Lockdown A Poem in 3 Voices**

Papa  
(Left Margin Voice)

Helena  
(Center Margin Voice)

Dad  
(Right Margin Voice)

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March 13, 2020 is the day we went into lockdown.

We made a school in our house and named it  
Helen West Middle School, after my grandma,  
because she is such a nerd.

My mom loved that and, even though she is in  
another state, it made her feel a part of our  
lockdown and like she was with us.

I got to go to school barefoot for over a year.  
And wear whatever I wanted.

No uniforms.

No uniform\$, no \$chool lunch, no field trip\$,  
no \$ports fee\$, no \$cience fair, and  
no \$chool activitie\$.  
\$aved u\$ a lot of money.

I didn't realize how much school  
nickel-and-dimed us to death.

We giggled at "Be careful on your way to school"  
because it was just the other room.

And I got to go barefoot to work for over a year because my work was the other side of the dining room table from Helen West Middle School.

Let's all meet in the lunchroom for lunch, okay?

Every day?

Yes, every day. Like best friends.

Science is my hardest class and it is first.

It's okay, I am right on the other side of the table. I will listen and help.

Every day?

Yes, every day. Like best friends.

Snacks galore in the school snack room, also known as the kitchen.

I was the first student in the Zoom waiting room every single class, every single day.

Why?

It was a way to get one-on-one time with each of my teachers. I really missed being in person, but being early and getting a few minutes of alone time with them helped. I also always went to

their office hours.

You are such a nerd.

She really is such a nerd.

Thank you. I learned that from you two nerds.

Sino and I had the kind of work that had both  
of us staying at home on lockdown as well.

Yep. Three peas in a pod.

We really were together every minute of every day.

Every minute. It was such a joy!

Like best friends.

Safe, with best friends.

School isn't safe anyway.

How so?

The bullies.

Oh yeah, you have had a lot of bullies at school,  
haven't you?

A lot.

A lot.

Being on lockdown was safer than  
school.

For some kids, being at school is  
safer than home.

Not for me. School is hateful sometimes.  
Exclusion. Invisibility.  
Name-calling. Ignoring. Unkindness.

I saw a lot of folks talking about the loss of  
social interaction and how much it was hurting  
kids, but for you it helped instead.

It did.  
It was safe here at home.  
Safer than school.

But you have social-emotional learning  
going on at your school.  
The school talks about it all the time.

Meh.

What does that mean?

I think that stuff is just to make the adults  
feel good. It doesn't change the way kids  
behave and adults are just naïve if they think  
it is doing something important.

Books were my friends.  
I nerded out on reading lots and lots of books.

*Artemis Fowl* by Eoin Colfer  
*The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind* by William Kamkwamba  
*Number The Stars* by Lois Lowry

Oh! She is my favorite!

*Other Words For Home* by Jasmine Warga  
*Farewell To Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

I loved re-reading that with you.

*The Odyssey* by Homer  
*Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen  
*Stamped* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

What I loved is that you both sat on the couch  
and read each of these books aloud so that  
I could hear them as well.

These were the best books I have been given  
in school.  
All my other years there was only whiteness.  
White authors.  
White characters.  
White, white, white.  
These were my first authors-of-color.  
I fell in love with reading more and more  
because of this.

The intimacy of reading.

Books and authors can be best friends too.

Definitely!

Definitely!

I nerded out on cooking and baking.  
Garlic noodles.  
Pork Afritada.

Wine-braised chicken.  
Homemade spaghetti sauce.  
Homemade biscuits.  
Banana bread.  
Carrot cake.  
Honey balsamic brussels sprouts and mushrooms.  
Braised Sicilian pork chops.  
Roasted cauliflower.  
Apple bread.  
Thai chicken curry.

The intimacy of cooking.

Delicious!  
And I loved calling our parents and getting  
their recipes.  
I started keeping a recipe book filled with  
their cooking wisdom.

I nerded out on gardening.  
Boston ferns.  
Holly ferns.  
Staghorn ferns.  
Asparagus ferns.  
Bird nest ferns.  
Alpine wood ferns.  
Rabbit's foot ferns.

The intimacy of a garden.

Beautiful and welcoming.  
Plus, that was a way to be connected

to your parents who also love to garden.

Garden nerd.

Cooking nerd.

Reading nerd.

There was a lot more.  
Figuring out online shopping.  
A new aquarium.  
Working on home security to make us feel safer.

I really got into documentaries.  
I also followed NASA every day.

Netflix.  
That's all I have to say.  
All 12 seasons of *The Big Bang Theory*.  
*Star Trek*.

Every *Star Trek* available.

I took a deep dive into music.  
Practicing my beloved violin.  
Zooming with family and playing for them.  
Aunt Margo sent me a ukulele.  
Aunt Kimberly got me a keyboard.  
I got into vinyl records. And cassettes.

You definitely got into 80's music.

Because of Netflix and *Stranger Things*.

*Stranger Things* is my absolute favorite!

I got into really vintage music too.  
The Police.  
Queen.  
David Bowie.  
Kate Bush.  
Peter Gabriel.

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I got into really vintage music too.  
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Kate Bush.  
Peter Gabriel.

“Vintage?”

It’s “vintage” to her.

Now I feel vintage.

Music.  
TV.  
Old friends.

Best friends.

We also had loss during our lockdown.  
Are you okay to talk about that Helena?

Maybe I’ll just listen. It’s too hard.

My dear dad was the first loss.  
It was so hard being so far away and

not being with my family at the end.  
He had been ill for a while,  
but COVID took him at the end.

Zoom funerals are so hard. We couldn't  
be with family to mourn him.

He loved the outdoors and music and  
his church and, most of all, mom.

And then my dad died 14 days later.  
He was the best dad too.  
And it was awful because no one was  
allowed in the hospital.  
We couldn't hold his hand.  
He was alone.

We did video with him.

Yes, he lit up when he saw you two  
on the screen.

But he died alone and it was horrible to  
think of him alone at the end.

He loved a good taco more than  
anyone I ever knew. He was kind  
and quiet-spoken. And he loved  
your mom so much.

I miss him so much.

Me too.

Me too.

In the end, we were on lockdown 550 days straight.  
We had a beautiful garden.  
We had engaging school work.

We had great food.  
We had great entertainment.  
We had amazing literature.

We had each other.

Yes, and the three of us  
had each other every second of every day.

Like best friends.

Yes, like best friends.

Just like best friends.

## Afterthoughts

We sat down as a family several times to reminisce about our pandemic lockdown and this poem in three voices comes from those conversations. Like many who will read this, we had unspeakable losses during this pandemic. We lost both of our fathers just fourteen days apart from each other. It was our child's first experience with death, loss, and grieving. Many other family members passed as well. The deaths of our loved ones were compounded by not being able to be at their bedsides when they transitioned, by not being able to travel and collectively grieve with our families, and by trying to grieve through Zoom funerals. These – and so many more traumas – made us focus on our gratitude and joy at having each other. We were constantly present with both our grief *and* joy.

An unexpected educational outcome in our poem surrounds the issue of bullying. Helena has, unfortunately, had more than her share of bullying at her school and being on lockdown and away from the bullies in her class made for a more enjoyable 6th-grade year for her. Helena's first year of middle school was in total lockdown. We were intentional in making her lockdown as comfortable as possible and our poem demonstrates that our efforts did help. In our case, because we are such a love-of-learning centric family, we believe that our child didn't experience learning loss, but

instead gained important organizational skills and educational values that will support her throughout her life. Still, being on lockdown for 550 days impacted social skills and development; it impacted the joy that school brings so many children because of its inherent social nature.

Another great loss is that there was a humanities teacher that our daughter had waited years to have and she had her only during the lockdown, only on a Zoom screen. She was the first teacher to have authors-of-color and was a fierce social justice educator and our daughter loved her and felt a great, great loss at not being able to be in her classroom face-to-face. There is a hole there at not having that face-to-face and heart-to-heart mentoring. It will always be a loss for all of us and just one more thing that the COVID pandemic took from us. We don't talk enough about the incredible loss of intimacy between teacher and student and how much that was impacted by not being in-person.

The messy traumas of lockdown still impact us to this day. We continue to see them in an increased fear of germs, of our stress in being in public spaces, and our high anxieties for the safety of our loved ones. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we can hold different emotions all at once – pain and fear and grief right alongside our love and joy and intimacy.