

Women's Perspectives

A Journal of Writing and Art by Adult Learners



What is Normal?

Women's Perspectives #18

WE LEARN Mission, Vision and Values

Mission Statement

WE LEARN is a community promoting women's literacy as a tool that fosters empowerment and equity for women.

Vision

WE LEARN seeks to build a just society and healthy communities. Therefore, we focus on education, specifically the basic literacies women need to gain access to systems of power and to achieve personal and community empowerment. Women's pursuit of multiple literacies gives visibility to our experiences as women, sustains our on-going desire to learn, encourages critical thinking, and provides the support and information necessary for reflection, understanding, and action to change our current situations.

WE LEARN engages a diverse membership community of adult basic education and literacy learners and alumni, educators, researchers and professional women, community activists and anyone dedicated to moving our mission forward.

WE LEARN members hold these values inwardly reflective of our networking organization and outwardly active to the communities we reach.

Values

- I. WE LEARN is Women-Centered / Women-Positive**
- II. WE LEARN Supports Social Change**
- III. WE LEARN Works towards Justice & Equity**
- IV. WE LEARN Acts through Participatory Practices**

Women's Perspectives #18

A Journal of Writing and Art by Adult Learners 2023

Women's Perspectives Issue 18 showcases original writing and artwork by adult learners across all levels. Writers and artists were asked to reflect and share ideas on the theme:

Now the pandemic is “over.”

What does your normal look like?

What success are you enjoying? What frustrations continue?
Where do you find strength? What are your goals?
Write about your life and dreams. How is time part of life?
Tips to help others with time management or setting new goals.
Is your new “normal” different from your “pre-Covid normal



Four-Armed
Avalokiteshvara

by Haifang Luo

Book Design

Layout and design by Marie Doerner and the WE LEARN Board.

Photos and art, where individual credit is given, are student work.

Introduction

Through personal stories, poems, opinion essays, or other forms of writing and art, students addressed such issues as family, community involvement, work experiences, educational achievements and goals. The writings show strength, courage, hope, determination, love, kindness, respect and many other attributes. The writings send a clear message about the ways adult learners add value to local and global communities.

We hope this collection of writing will encourage and inspire all students. We hope they will use these writings to consider a broad range of possibilities for how they choose to be impacted by the messages they receive, for how they can be aware of the messages they send, for ways to recognize their own contributions and place in society. These writings provide a catalyst for change in support of women's literacy.

WE LEARN BOARD

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WE LEARN received writings from students across the Americas: from California to Trinidad. They represented a range of topics and writing ability. This issue 31 writings and 17 pieces of art, and a photograph were chosen to be published. The selection committee chose work they felt best represented the theme. They also considered voice, clarity, heart, and writing technique. In reproducing the work for publication, we have corrected typing and spelling errors, but have maintained the writers' original wording even in cases of non-standard sentence construction.

2023 Selection Committee

Geraldine Cannon Becker, Maine

Marie Doerner, California

Stacie Evans, New York

Jaye Jones, New York

Shellie Walters, Washington

Jessica Ramos-Bahena, California



Rose by Caroline Wang

You can download copies of this edition
from the WE LEARN website:
www.welearnwomen.org.

Table of Contents

Pre-Writing Questions	3
Introduction	4
Thank You to Participating Programs	7
Index of Student Writers	9
Writings	11
Writing Tips	42



Year of the
Rabbit

by Caroline
Wang

WE LEARN publishes original student writings in *Women's Perspectives*.

Respect the integrity of this work.

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Thank You

to the participating programs that encouraged their students to
send writings and art

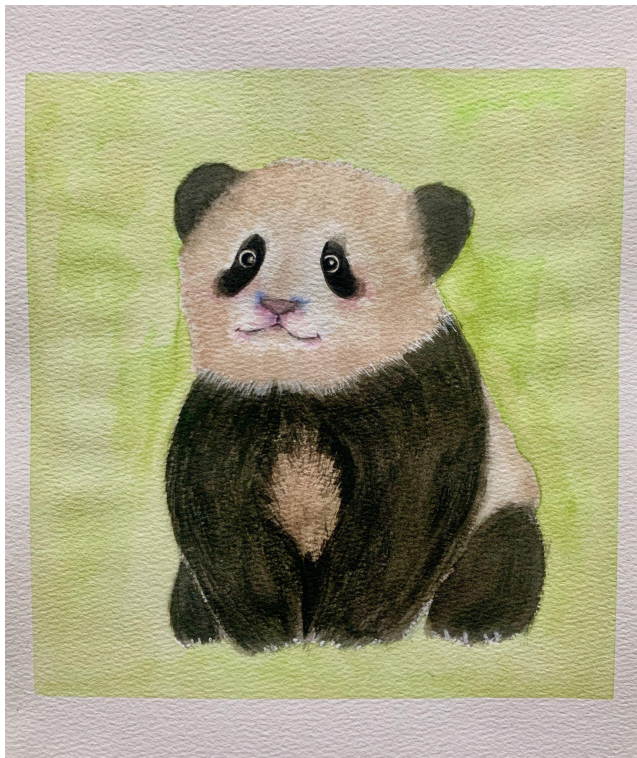
Chicago

Queensborough Community College Literacy Program New York

Adult Literacy Tutors Association(ALTA) Trinidad and Tobago

San Diego College of Continuing Education – ECC San Diego,
California

Pleasanton Public Library Pleasanton, California



Panda by Caroline Wang

Thoughts from Student Leader and Board Member, **Shellie Walters**

As students, we often put ourselves down. We don't think we can do anything. We put ourselves down just because we can't read or write well or can't do math, and maybe we don't have a very good education or had bad experiences in school. We didn't think we could be good or useful until we had a good education. But what were we doing with what we DID have before we came into a literacy program?

For example, my verbal skills were very good, but I didn't have written skills. I could hide my poor writing skills because I have great verbal skills. I could cover other things because of that, too.

Women who have poor reading and writing skills have lots of other skills. Many women are successful in work or their family or their community, but they are not recognized as successful because of a lack they had in another area.

So, when we come back to school, we're seen as lacking. We celebrate our school successes AFTER we come back, but we forget that we were also productive before!

We have always found ways to make things work in our lives. We have skills in everyday survival beyond reading, but we should not forget we have these coping/surviving skills.

Many women have a good work ethic. They are good workers and are able to keep a job.

There are different standards. We don't need the degrees to be successful in many areas, but education helps us to be more successful. Every step up the rung should be celebrated.

We celebrate students' voices of strength and resilience. As students, we need to have a look at what we DO have rather than what we don't have. We DO have an important point of view. We ARE already making contributions to society, and they will become stronger with more education.

Index of Student Writers

What is Normal?	Creative Writing Class	11
Normal: After the Pandemic	Alma Walker	12
New Normal	Margaret Fudge	13
My New Normal	Jacklyn Conway	13
Mom’s New Normal	Mitchell Smith	14
Growing Up	Natalie Jackson	15
What is Normal?	Caroline Wang	16
Getting Healthy	Robin Flowers	17
Equal Pay	Honni Harris	18
Being Married	Nathan Binger	19
Before and After the Pandemic	Andra Wilson	19
My New Lifestyle	Cherryann Walker	20
Setting Goals for the New Normal	Dianne Rampersad	21
Goals and Dreams	Isha Samuel	22
What is Normal?	Justlyn Griffith	22
Now the Pandemic is Over	Meela Dosaran	23
The New Normal	Patrice Thompson	24
Unexpected Guests	Kyunglim Lee	25
My New Normal	Shirley Arjoonsingh	27
What is Normal?	Aneka Moonsammy	29
Learning to Cope	Deborah Bernard	30
My Family and Myself	Helen Berment	31
My Journey Through the Pandemic	Hemlata Mohammed	32
What is Normal?	Janelle Natalie Baptiste-La Borde	34
Returning to Normal	Vera Sooknanan	35
Mentors are Very Important	Natalie Jackson	36
Challenges of Returning to Normal	Rachel Caseman	37
Transition	Serenity Bourgeois	38
My New Normal	Natasha Parris Pierre	38
Setting New Goals	Natalie Charles	39
Giving Up is Not an Option	Lianne Ayres	40

Index of Student Artists and Photographers

Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara	Haifang Luo	3
Silent		17
Falling		37
Coexistence	Kyunglim Lee	38
아무것도 아닌나,그러나 전부인 (Nothing but Everything)		15
Beautiful Flowering Quince	Caroline Wang	12
Rose Watercolor		34
Rose Watercolor 2		5
Panda		7
Rose Colored Pencil		46
Personal Landscape		21
Kestrel		36
Magnolia		29
Tree		39
Year of the Rabbit		6
Monument Valley		18
Normal? Now what do we do?	Robert Moreno	28

Note: "The Lost Memories" is a series of work I began in 2015 and have continuously worked on to today. In this series, I attempt to pick up on memories which would otherwise be lost with time – be it an old photo, a hug, or an intimate relationship. I use color to document people, events, and ever-passing scenery which were once familiar but are now blurry and fleeting. I hope to pack all of those memories, piece-by-piece, moment-by-moment into my works to serve as a reflection of my life.

Haifang Luo

What is Normal?

Women's Perspectives, Issue #18

What is Normal? Creative Writing Class- SDCCE

N- new normal for everyone

O- online classes and meetings

R- reminding us that things can change

M- masks are optional, annoying and protective

A Angry, anxious, annoyed but accepting

L- life changes. Get used to it!!!

Normal: After the Pandemic

Alma Walker

Confusion is what I believe has happened to our world. There are debates presently in effect concerning the firing of a college professor who has not been vaccinated, due to her religious beliefs. The Covid-19 mandate has been lifted, so students are allowed back in school without being vaccinated, but the teachers are facing termination if they do not.

Our system is contradictory on what you can and cannot do. Our world has so much discord in it. (My way or the highway) It's out of control and we really need a solution to fix this.

There is also a shortage of police officers and they're offering a substantial amount of money for officers who have quit the force, to come back. Also, they are looking for new recruits. When did our world get so bad that people don't want to help anymore?

Remember, the new normal doesn't have older people in it. It has computers that have replaced our senior citizens. Social media has become the new norm, for a large number of people. It's not too late to make this a better world. We need more caring and compassionate politicians. Also, we the people should be involved in decisions. Not just the government making decisions for us. People need to vote. People need to be active in their community.



Beautiful
Flowering
Quince by
Caroline Wang

New Normal

Margaret Fudge

Before the pandemic, I could go to class. I would ride the bus to the trolley station. I would get on the #3 bus to get to school. It took about two hours because I live in the boondocks. Finally, I stopped going to school because of my back. I couldn't sit in class and on the bus for all those hours. My doctor told me to stop.

When the pandemic happened, I could come back to school on Zoom. The best part about being online is that I can still see my friends and my teacher even if I am not there. My cat, Abby Rose, comes to class as well.

Now the pandemic is over, I can choose whether I go to school in person or on Zoom. It is good because I like to come to school. So far, I have gone in person two times. In the future, I will try to get out of the house and go to school in person more often.

My New Normal

Jacklyn Conway

During COVID, I moved home to Oklahoma and into my own little house. Now, my new normal is to get some things done like cleaning house, doing laundry, working outside, and planting flowers.

I am so glad that we don't have to wear annoying masks anymore. We have freedom to go places now without wearing masks. People can get out and go for long walks. A lot of people like to go to restaurants to eat. People can go back to school and work now, but I go to school online. I also study with my friends online as well. I couldn't do that before.

Recently, I lost my pug named Sadie after sixteen years. I have been so lonely, but now I just got a new puppy. He is nine months old and is a Maltese. He is all white, and his name is Hank. Hank loves to be outside to run and then he sleeps a bunch. This crazy dog gets bursts of energy every once in a while and runs around the house. Hank is very good company.

This is a story about my mom and her new normal. Her new normal happened years ago but it affects her every day. She is disabled. She has a broken neck. She has faced the pain every day so that became her new normal.

When I was a boy, my mom was a strong person. She would give piggyback rides. She could walk upstairs and do what everybody else could do. When I was 12, she broke her neck.

My mom is very stubborn. This quality has helped her get through many troubled times in her life. My mom does not look disabled except for the cane she walks with. So when we are in public places, people do not think she is disabled. One example is, when I was kid at summer camp, my mom showed up to pick my brother and me up. The sign out sheet was on the table, but the table was at the bottom of a slope. I told the people who worked at the camp, "My mom can't walk to the table because of neck." They didn't believe me so she walked down to the table. Then she started walking back. It took her three hours to walk back up the slope.

Everyone left summer camp before she got halfway way up the slope. The very same camp workers at the sign-in desk walked past and said sorry to me.

My mom, being stubborn, made it up the slope. This still happens to her to this day. If there is a happy ending to this story, it's that my mom has a stronger faith in god. Plus she gets disability from the government.

Growing up as a young adult has been a really interesting journey because after my parents divorced, it brought me into a really dark time where I have to do everything on my own and become my own self advocate in life. When I was a young teenager in my transition group, I decided to come out to my parents by telling them I was Queer & Bisexual and both of them told me they will always love and support me no matter what and it's ok to be different.

Now that I'm a lot older, I'm starting to do everything on my own. I've been making my own meals on a daily basis, taking my pills at night, getting chores done around the house and focusing on my oral and mental health because it's really important and beneficial in adult life. One of my goals that I really would like to start working on is losing weight so I could start fitting in my own clothes.

In the far-off future, after I'm done with college, I would like to transfer to credit college classes to get my first associates degree in Culinary Arts. The last few years have been hard, but I am growing and learning. I am excited to reach the future.



아무것도 아님나, 그러나 전부인
by Kyunglim Lee

Before the outbreak, my children believed that the world was beautiful. They studied hard, participated in various activities based on their interests, and traveled during the holidays. Everything was done step by step.

We almost forget life is complicated, unpredictable, and uncertain. Suffering is the norm. Until the school closed in March 2020 because of Covid-19, they started to stay home and study online. All competitions and events were canceled, even my son's high -school graduation ceremony. Trips were put on hold. Before we got the vaccine, we rarely even met with friends.

It was not just us. It seemed everyone's mood was frustrated, anxious, and disappointed. As our pink bubble burst, we realized the world was a vale of tears. My children often quarreled, and my daughter liked to be locked in her room by herself, and the atmosphere at home was no longer happy.

But we came to realize that we shouldn't magnify our suffering anytime because too many people suffer more than us in this world.

We found that resilience was critically essential in current personal situations. "Focusing on what you do for somebody else is active. It increases confidence and determination", says Adam Grant, organizational psychologist and New York Times best-selling author. So I started volunteering with my kids. In 2020, we worked with our friends, made 100 protective face shields for clinics in the community, and created beautiful hand-painted rocks for Hospice patients. In 2021, we participated in more volunteer activities, painted murals for a farm, and conducted free crafting and cooking classes through Zoom. In 2022, my daughter and her friends sold their hand-painted cards and canvas bags for fundraising, donated

the money to Kids Against Hunger, and packaged thousands of meals for refugee children in Ukraine.

We started to focus not on contributions we received from others but on contributions given to others, which made us happier.

Changes are normal. A person's real maturity is accepting the world's impermanence. My children and I love this world, and we want to use our love to brighten our lives and those of others.



Silent
by Haifang Luo

Getting Healthy

Robin Flowers

I am happy because I am getting my strength back. I am walking better. I am eating healthy. Changing my eating habits was difficult at first, but now I can enjoy food again. It is important getting the right foods and sticking to my diet. My dream for the future is to live longer and to go back to school. To keep improving, I need to listen to my doctors. They tell me how to have the best life.

Hi my name is Honni Harris I'm a native Chicago resident. I'm a single mother I have parental guardianship over my nephews. I'm a Roc- Chicago Leader (aka Restaurant Opportunity Center)

I have been a member of Roc Chicago for 3 years I'm glad to be here today celebrating Black Women's Equal Pay Day. I'm a Black women standing here today still struggling with Equal Pay. I'm wondering if the sheriff is at the door to put my family and myself out. My family and I are facing eviction from our apartment due to the fact it's not enough income in our household. I went to file a motion, I was denied. As a part time Tipped worker there's is no full time work like 40 a week I have to work 2 jobs. I find myself in this situation not because I'm not a good worker or a kind person but I'm not 25 or a size 9. Why should that matter? it does in this climate. Black women like me are affected by low wages. I work I still rely on subsidy income I receive a link card (Food Stamps) & medical card to take care of my family and myself still not enough to feed and buy clothes for us. I want a quality of life for myself and my family. Stress free from living in poverty. I support Chicago Raise Ordinance it's going to give me a High Wage plus my tips This Ordinance will help Black, Latino women and myself take better care of our families and their quality of life. Roc- Chicago Restaurant Opportunity Center has help 7 states and 1 municipality city become One Fair Wage Alaska



,California , Minnesota
,Montana ,Nevada
,Oregon, and
Washington State the
city Flagstaff
Arizon Support Chicago
Raise Ordinance. Help
us become the 2 Largest
Cities with a Living Wage
\$15 For All Chicago
Workers

Monument Valley by
Caroline Wang

Being Married

Nathan Binger

My new normal is being married to my beautiful wife. We are having a daughter together which is so nice. My other new normal is having a great new family. I love my mother-in-law, father-in-law and sister-in-law, If I ever got a divorce, I would not know what to do without these amazing people in my life. This family is my family so I will not mess this up.

Before and After the Pandemic

Andra Wilson

Before the Pandemic, I was an active person in a lot of groups, schools, classes etc. I loved the beach a lot and also going for bus rides to do what I had to get done. Even before Covid, I always used hand sanitizer and I blocked my nose from some smells that made me very ill. This was because I was a cancer survivor since 1997. Up until now I always still get very ill because of my past treatments. The cells in my body are not the same as before so things will always pop up in my body. I am always in and out of hospital so when Covid came up, I had to be very careful with the places I go. Things I used to do I had to stop. Most of all I missed my big sister who used to come down every carnival to play mass as this would put off all the stresses we had when we had fun. Because of the lock-down she was not able to come and had to play the carnival in her dreams.

It was sad. Movies, churches etc had closed down and a lot of people lost their jobs. The transport and food prices went sky-high. Thank God I still have my bike and I could go places that were not too far. When I listened to the news from places outside the country with a lot of people dead on a monthly basis, it was sad. Thank God, things were hard over here in Trinidad and Tobago but not that bad like the other cities. Yes, I lost many friends to Covid and cancer but at the same time I had a lot of family and friends who made it through and still live to talk about it. We still have to thank the Father or whatever religion we all come from, we all thank him.

Still, we all have to live and move on in life. We have to stay strong, have faith and try to help one another. In March one of my sons got married. It was hard because of the Covid. I also just came out of hospital for my son's wedding. I was still weak but I still tried to have a good happy time for my son. It went ok. A lot of people could not

come but we all had a blessed time. All what has happened with Covid will make you stronger or make you fall. But when you fall you get back up stronger. In May of the same year my oldest son died. That was very sad and frustrating for me. A lot of people could not come or be near me. This included my own sister who lived outside the country. She couldn't come to her favourite nephew's funeral. We all had to stay strong and hold it together.

Now as the country is back to normal it is still the same for me in some ways. I still have to use masks and hand sanitizer however now I can go back in the sea. I still do some of the things I love doing. Food and transport is still sky-high. Some people get back their jobs but not all. A lot of people do things differently to live and survive. Now people have to do things to help themselves. My ALTA class remained online which was very hard for me as I am not too much of a cell phone person but I had to learn. I always liked my ALTA but for years I have always started and fall out because I am always in and out of hospital. But not this time. I am not letting anything hold me back or keep me down. With online classes I can do it even if I am not feeling well. I just have to take off my camera and explain to the teacher.

My New Lifestyle

Cherryann Walker

Now that the pandemic is over I find myself setting new goals for my personal life as well as my family because my sense of normalcy has changed greatly. Before the pandemic I felt lost and frustrated. I felt like I had no real path. I felt hopeless. During lockdown, due to the pandemic, the isolation made me realise that I have one life to live and I will live it. It inspired me to pursue my education more seriously.

Returning to normal life after the pandemic wasn't difficult for me. It actually gave me a lot of time to think about my future and how I would like it to be. It give me strength to undertake certain self-developmental goals that I would otherwise be too anxious or scared to pursue. One of those goals is joining an ALTA class. Although Covid took away many things from my life, like my mom and my freedom to go as I please, it gave me a reason to change my life in a positive way.

Setting Goals for the New Normal Dianne Rampersad

Now that the pandemic is over, I find myself setting new goals because being at home during the entire time of Covid-19 was stressful. I felt what it was like to be shut away from the world and away from my family.

During the pandemic I started to feel depressed and sad. Seeing people dying all over made me think about my life and health. During that time, I would look up recipes on YouTube. One thing I started to love was baking cakes and icing them. I started to take orders for my cakes. It was an exceptional experience for me. Now my goal is to open my own bakery someday.

The pandemic taught me to love nature and the outdoors. I learnt to plant my own garden and I still keep it up now that the pandemic is over. I found myself exercising and eating healthier after the pandemic.

One of my biggest goals in life was to read and write properly. I started ALTA during Covid times and now that the pandemic is over, I want to complete the ALTA programme. My goals now are to continue with the good things I have learnt during the pandemic.



Personal
Landscape
by Caroline
Wang

Goals and Dreams

Isha Samuel

Now that the pandemic is “over”, I find myself setting new goals because through all of this I have learned many valuable lessons. I have learned not to take life for granted. One day you’re here, the next day you’re not.

My first dream is to build a relationship with God. This is something that I have been struggling with for years. I finally understand the importance of this. I also realised that everything in life requires discipline. Without discipline, you will never reach your full potential. One of my dreams is to master the art of being humble.

Another goal is to complete my ALTA classes by attending all of my classes for the term. By doing this, it will enable me to learn more so that I can graduate.

I would love to start travelling from next year with my kids to experience different countries and their culture. I would like to focus on a passion and take life one day at a time. My other goals would be to work out to feel good, read a book every two months and spend more time with family to create more memories.

What is Normal?

Justlyn Griffith

In Trinidad and Tobago, nothing is normal. We all go about asking people, “How are you?” and they answer, “Normal”.

What is normal? Things are not normal in the country. To me, everything is upside down. Before Covid started, we were not normal. It was the government and things were not in place with them nor for me.

I am protecting myself by washing my hands as often as I can. Sanitize, do social distancing and I do inhaling as well.

The people tend to tell themselves that the pandemic is gone but for me it's not. When I am leaving home I always have put my mask on my face and also have a backup in my bag in case of anything should happen to the one on my face.

When I get in a taxi, I always go for the front seat. I try not to sit with three passengers to the back. In the maxi, I'll sit in the single seat. If a single seat is not available, I go to another maxi to make sure I get a single seat. Sometimes I hire a taxi to carry me alone to and from where I need to go. So I try my best to stay safe, take my vitamins and eat and drink good.

I ask myself if normal will ever come back. No. We will have to adjust ourselves to this time. In life, we know many challenges. So in this challenging time, we have to look to our Father who is in heaven. I'll ask him to guide and protect me and I will do what I have to do like sanitize, wash my hands very often and do my best to keep me and the family safe. Don't forget the wearing of the mask is very important. I live by myself so I will call my children and let them know that the virus is out there and be safe. Make sure that the children do their social distancing and sanitizing of their hands.

Now the Pandemic is Over

Meela Deosaran

Nothing is normal anymore now that the pandemic is over. I have lost families and friends in this pandemic. It was hard for me. I could not visit them in the hospital or even attend their funerals to say my last goodbyes. Oh how my heart still aches.

My mornings used to start off at 5am where I would go to the savannah and make four laps around, come home and get organized for work. I work in the Agriculture sector so that would make us essential. I remember driving to work and the place used to feel like a ghost town. It was so peaceful yet was so scary at the same time. With food places closed we had to

cook our own food everyday. It reminded me of long ago when I was growing up. I love to cook so it was not a problem for me.

Weddings, birthdays, Divali, Eid and Christmas would be celebrated by immediate families only. I love going to beaches, rivers, water parks, hikes and other outdoor activities and all this was restricted. So I used to spend more time in my kitchen garden. I also used to sew face masks to give out when there was a shortage. Then some people asked me to supply them with masks to sell. I was grateful for the extra cash.

In my spare time I started looking at YouTube tutorials on how to make decorative cakes. I started making cakes and I became good at it, which led me to open a small sideline business called Mel's Cakery – sweet moments of life.

The pandemic took a lot from us and it taught us a lot too. I count my blessings everyday and I thank God for my health and strength for it is my wealth.

The New Normal

Patrice Thompson

My normal will not be the same as before, well not everything that is. My normal before the pandemic was going to work, church, going to the movies with my son and grand and spending time with friends and family on weekends.

When I first heard about Covid-19 I took action and got prepared before the lockdown by purchasing masks, hand sanitizer, and Pine-Sol to keep the house sanitized and clean. In 2020 after the carnival was the first lockdown. It was not that bad in my community. People came and showed their kindness by giving out groceries in the community. I must say my blessings were overflowing. I had enough to make small bags and give out to those in need.

Later that year there was much sad news of Covid-19 deaths. Into 2021 was terrible, so many families lost their loved ones, and so many have lost their jobs. That was a terrible time for everyone financially and mentally because we were separated from our friends and family. It was like our faith and strength

were being tested. Nevertheless, that year, I was blessed with a small business and I must say for the first year I did well. But as the Covid-19 cases kept rising and with all the deaths and the loss of jobs, small businesses started to suffer losses. Some even closed down. Thank God for my few supporters I am still going but I must say it's not looking good.

Now that Covid has died down and things are back to normal, I can visit the beach, go to church and spend time with my friends and family. I also started ALTA class online and I hope one day soon we will be face-to-face in a class. That will be nice. I have learned it's always good to prepare for rainy days. No matter what happens whether it is good or bad, always keep a positive mind and attitude. Never let it make you bitter but better.

Unexpected Guests

Kyunglim Lee

In fact, I never thought it would happen to me. I went for a covid test for class on Saturday, since I had a little headache and some body aches. I was surprised to see a positive test, but I knew it was possible. From then on, I paid a lot of attention to disinfecting the house while quarantining at home. It got better to some extent, and I thought it was all over now. That day when I was working like usual. Then, I felt something like water pouring down my head, then my hand became paralyzed.

After noticing a sudden change, my husband who was taking an online class next to me and son in the room saw me, and called an ambulance. I wasn't feeling sick, just my hands and face were numb and I couldn't stand up... but I thought I would get better soon. So I was telling my son not to call 911. But the ambulance arrived in 10 minutes. The people who had already arrived from the ambulance checked me and tied me up right away, and went to the hospital. From then on, I was completely quarantined, did various tests, and the doctor told

me that I had a cerebral hemorrhage. Time became different, like I was in a vacuum. Everything seemed to have stopped, and I remembered the day I transferred to a new school when I was a child. A time where I had to cut ties with everything there, and all of a sudden I had to go somewhere else...Oh! It's possible! It's not that difficult to die. It's not that far away, and it might be a place where you can easily move without suffering so much! Am I well-prepared to cross over to the other side? Did I do something that other people would resent?... And now my family will have to live without me?... Various thoughts crossed my mind. But I thought that God, who had given me the best in my life, is also giving me what I need at this moment.

As my mind was at ease, I felt I had lived my life to the fullest. I had no regrets at all. There is nothing for me to do, and nothing more to be done... I couldn't do anything without the help of the nurse, and I had to endure my life moment by moment. The first night in the intensive care unit was the longest night of my life. After two more days in the intensive care unit, I was transferred to a general ward, and spent about a month in the hospital, including the rehabilitation hospital.

Five months have passed now as I write this, and I have recovered a lot. I am now able to make artwork as before, and I am able to prepare meals with my family and live a normal life. During that time, I received a lot of prayers, encouragement, and love from many people. This time brought on so many strong emotions, that I would never forget for the rest of my life. It would have been better if it hadn't happened, but looking back now, I don't know how many precious things I would have realized without those times, like how I should live in the future... This extra time filled me with newfound motivation and energy to live my life. It was a precious time that made me realize how much I am loved. I thank God for giving me endless blessings, and I thank my family for persistently helping me in my rehabilitation, and I am very grateful to everyone who knows.

My new normal will never be normal for me. I lost so many loved ones over this pandemic I am still coming to terms with the idea that they are not here.

Before the pandemic life was good. I was living life to the fullest. I enjoyed going to family gatherings, church services and to the movies with my friends. Business was good also. I loved beautifying clients in my hair salon and making sure each one felt gorgeous. I also enjoyed travelling with my sister and daughter every year to experience life in the big city.

I remember when I returned home from New York in 2019 I began hearing about the deadly virus on the news. This virus was like no other. It started in China and was spreading quickly to other parts of the world. This virus was known as the Corona virus or Covid-19. Before I knew it, we had our first case in Trinidad. This was so scary because by this time the cases were rising quickly worldwide and more people in our small island contracted the virus.

Eventually our government had no other choice but to declare a state of emergency and lock down the country in order to contain the spread of the virus. By this time, all around me people were losing their loved ones and they were panicking, calling for prayers. It was frightening to hear. The word “died” was so common to every home. It was a hard time for a lot of families who were affected.

My hair salon had to be closed. This placed extreme financial hardship on my family, knowing it was my only source of income. I was worried about how my bills were going to be paid and how the closing of my business would affect me in the future. Apart from my financial difficulties I was also worried about the safety of my family as the deaths were in the thousands.

I lost my sister the first year of the virus to Lupus and the next year my sister-in-law got Covid and died. My brother-in-law,

Indar, was a past student of ALTA. He was even successful in completing the full ALTA course and was very happy to be chosen for the ALTA advertisement on television. It used to bring us so much joy to see him on TV. It was heartbreaking for all of us when he got into complications due to Covid-19 and died. We all felt so hopeless. As for my family and I, it is difficult for us to enjoy the same lifestyle we once had. We simply cannot forget them. And still to this day we have to wear a mask outside of our home.

In spite of all the trouble and pain, I look to God who said in Psalm 23 that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; and as one songwriter wrote, "I look to you, and when all melodies are gone, in you I hear a song, I look to you".



What to do in the New Normal? by Robert Moreno

Normal isn't normal anymore. Since Covid-19, almost three years now, life hasn't been the same. My life has changed. It has been a challenge day by day. Being a self-employed person, married with children, at first I could cope. Then with no money coming in, bills to pay and online classes for the children but no computer devices, I was going mad. However, the almighty God didn't forget me. Help came.

I started to work in late 2022, but by then I lost most of my customers. So, I had to look for other sources of income. I didn't look at the negative side of it. I started to plant some of the food we eat and grew some chickens. By doing this I was able to pay some bills.

Up to this day things are not the same as before. If one of my children has the cold, they must go to the doctor or stay home from school for seven days. I do not visit anyone or allow anyone in my space. I am cleaner than before. Sometimes my family thinks that I am over cleaning. We live in the bush, so they don't know much about the danger out there.

So, what is normal? I really do not know.



Magnolia
by Caroline Wang

I continue to feel frustrated. Am I the only one frustrated by the turn of events? Is change the underlying cause for my frustration? Is there any other cause for my frustration? I am learning to cope with it all.

I continued to feel frustrated although I believed the worst was behind us. The beginning of my frustration was when we were told that we must wear a mask. I had no idea what it would feel like to wear a mask but I know that I didn't want to be caught without one because the fine was \$1000. I had my first full use of the mask the 16th of April, 2020 when going to run some errands. I left home around 9:30 am and I was at the bank by 9:45am. After standing there for ten minutes, I began to feel like I couldn't breathe and that I would fall down. I bent over and removed my mask in an attempt to feel better and avoid people seeing me without a mask on. I continued doing this until I had completed all of my errands.

After not being able to see family and friends as our hearts desired, they finally decided to open up everywhere with some restrictions. I jumped at the opportunity to visit my best friend. Now face to face, our arms embraced each other and our lips finally released their deepest secrets. "I lost my job and now I am three months behind in rent and John left me and the children." Her eyes became as red as fire and her nose started running. In a soft voice, I said, "Things will get better." Her eyes were gazing into the distance but her lips asked, "How are things with you?" I replied, "I am no longer in farming where I was able to make huge amounts of money and afford the lavish lifestyle that I was used to but I learned to adapt. Auntie Suzie died and I am struggling to deal with that. I never got to say

goodbye and thank you to her because of the restrictions.” We both became silent but you could hear our thoughts. For some odd reason, the topic changed to our grey hair and our aching bodies. Laughter filled the room ending our day on a high note.

By the way, I am now the proud owner of a recycling business and my friend got back her job with the government .

My Family and Myself

Helen Berment

It is often said that the only thing that is constant is change and that is the most truthful and profound statement that has ever been made. This pandemic, if nothing else, showed us this.

My new normal is not so different from my pre-Covid normal. I am not employed, so I didn't lose my job but my sister lost hers. Before the pandemic, she drove a bus and transported school children. To this day she is without a job. She was renting with her four children and got evicted. I was able to speak to my dad and he agreed to let her renovate an apartment that we have on the compound. She and her children are okay now.

I come from a very big family. We are always getting together. There is always a gathering and during the lockdown it didn't stop. We didn't break any laws either, because a lot of us live in the same yard and the others live close by.

Fortunately for me, being able to go to church was not affected either, because my husband is responsible for putting our church services online. So, even though churches were closed, we were there every Sunday to record and air the message. I really enjoyed going to the supermarket because only a small number of persons were allowed inside at a time and that was

great. It was almost like I was there by myself, which is something I like.

But in all of this, I think I benefited the most from being able to have my husband at home with me for two years. You see, we had just gotten married in November of 2019. This is not a person with whom I had ever spent much time outside of church. So I got the very rare opportunity to learn a lot about him. It was like a two-year-long honeymoon. It was good, a good two years and if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing.

My Journey Through the Pandemic Hemlata Mohammed

“Now that the pandemic is over and things are back to normal” the world says but it's not exactly like my normal. My new normal is different from my previous normal. My normal before the pandemic is me going to work and continuing my courses, my husband having my financial support and my kids enjoying their school days. Instead I am retrenched from my job and my husband is financially burdened with all the expenditure of our family. With the continuing inflation in the cost of living, it's more burdensome than ever before. Being retrenched has not been easy for me. Losing that ability to support my family is not a great thing to experience.

I would have liked to return to work, to assist my family. There isn't anything that was there before Covid-19 that I would not have wanted to be the same except for the job situation.

My family and I are an indoor family. We don't interact with the outdoor situation much except for going to church which had its difficulty during the pandemic as no services could be held but that didn't change the church service after Covid-19 which makes our new normal the same as before.

The strength and support to return to normal came from God and the church ministers. God has been providing for my family. There is no doubt about that.

Yes I am still in need of a job but I don't want to be complaining about anything. Challenges are always there in life. Everyone deals with their challenges differently. My way of dealing with it is to trust God and do my best. I want to be thankful and continue to trust in God's plan for all of us and that will be my advice to everyone.

Now that the pandemic is 'over', I find myself setting new goals because the pandemic has given me the opportunity to learn some new skills, such as learning the computer etc. Other than that, all my goals remain the same and I have achieved some already.

A pandemic is a frustrating thing. Everyday living has become frustrating- loss of jobs, inflation of the cost of living and dealing with online services have become stressful due to the pandemic. This is especially true for some elderly who have difficulty in learning the computer to do online transactions.

Making it through the pandemic with good health and strength has to be considered a success. Some didn't make it through the pandemic.

In closing, I want to say that everyone has their own experience of what the pandemic has done to them and how they will handle the New Normal. Please remember to always trust in God's plans and do your best.

What is Normal?

Janelle Natalie Baptiste-La Borde

First of all, I ask myself at times, “Will it ever go back to normal?” I don’t think so. We need to accept what is the new normal, Covid is here to stay. Life has its challenges. That is why I choose to make God my number one in my life.

In addition, food prices just started to escalate- market, appliances, medication even the mask to prevent Covid went ridiculously high. Don’t talk for taxi fare.

What are we to do? There are a lot of red flags in caring for a child with autism. We don’t have enough resources for them. When we complain to doctors, nurses, teachers, they will say, “Yes, we know more has to be done and government is not doing enough.”

Furthermore, thank God for my parent, my brothers, relative and friends. When we have good people around us, it makes it much easier. I am not going to let Covid keep me down. With God all things are possible. My daughters will achieve their goals.

Finally I was in the supermarket with my two daughters, Faith and Arianna, and a man I do not know came up to me. He said of my daughters that Faith will be a police and Arianna will be a doctor. He did not know that Arianna is autistic. I just accepted his statement and smiled. With all that is going on around us, I said to myself “With God all things are possible.”



Rose WaterColor by
Caroline Wang

Returning to normal would be difficult unless I focus on what is within my control. I consider this as a time to reflect on who I want to be during this time. I am not sure if it is good to be informed and it's a really good idea to take breaks from conversation involving any information related to COVID -19. The virus must be eliminated world-wide which most scientists agree is near impossible because of how widespread it is. It happens when infection due to the virus becomes capable of spreading widely and rapidly. Whether or not they have symptoms, infected people can be contagious and the virus can spread from them to other people.

How many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will I need to get to complete my primary series? The truth is that nobody knows exactly what comes next. Uncertainty continues to reign.

For the first time in a long while, it feels like we can reasonably contemplate the future. After weeks of quarantine and stay-at-home orders, we are starting to see encouraging signs of progress where we can visit our neighbours, friends and families. We learned that many of them were feeling lonely, helpless and looking for support especially when they suffered the loss of a loved one. We are all still battling with the global pandemic disease – COVID-19.

Mentors are Very Important

Natalie Jackson

In life, it is very important to have mentors. I have two people in my life that help me a lot. My mentors are Merle Thomas and my grandpa on my mom's side.

Merle is my Tailored Day case worker who helps and supports me with my basic academics and anxiety support. She helps me in different real life situations when I'm going through something physical, mental or emotional in my life. We have a couple things in common like listening to rap music. That keeps me going in life.

My other mentor is my Grandpa on my mom's side who passed away back in 2019. He was the most sarcastic person in our whole family, but in a loving, friendly way. Until when he got diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer (Lymphoma). Then he started getting really weak and unable to walk. He went into hospice yet he had a card on his table in his room for my birthday. He has always told me, "No matter what happens in your life's future, you could do anything you put your mind into," and "Follow and chase after your dreams." Even though he died after telling me those words, he is the love of my life. His memory keeps me moving forward.

Kestrel

by Caroline Wang



Challenges of Returning to Normal Rachel Caseman

The strength and support to return to normal is a bit challenging because the country will not be the same after this pandemic. I would say that many things have changed because the cost of living is so high and many people lost their jobs.

The government of this country is not making things easier for us. I try to be positive in everything I do, like doing more outdoor activities and exercise to keep focussed. I even try to help by feeding the poor.

I hope that one day everything will go back the way it used to be. People will get their jobs back and we can all provide for our families and be happy. For now, we have to be positive and take it one day at a time.



Falling

by
Haifang
Luo

Many people ask this question everyday now that the pandemic is over. Are we back to normal yet? The experts say we are and doing a fantastic job at it considering what we had to deal with but for me I can't imagine myself as that vulnerable, timid little human I was before. Afraid to step out of my comfort zone, scared to live my best life, but not anymore.

I will say proudly that COVID-19 has created a new beginning for me. Believe it or not, I, yes me, found my voice, my confidence, self-worth and the real me which is amazing! I renewed my relationship with my God which was much needed.

Utilising time to further my education is an investment not only for myself but for my family as well. Now with all that said, moving on and going out to parties and exposing my family to new strains of COVID is a no no for me. My new normal is being home with my children, optimistic about the future, taking in each moment as it comes and enjoying life one day at a time. This is my new normal.



Coexistence
by
Kyuglim Lee

Now that the pandemic is “over”, I find myself setting new goals. During the pandemic a lot of businesses had to close. Only businesses such as groceries, pharmacies and hardware stores were allowed to open. With no income coming in, bills to be paid, my family to take care of and groceries to purchase, I started thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of owning a business.

Now that both essential and non-essential businesses were allowed to open and I was able to return to work, I made an investment and opened my own business, selling essential goods.

One thing lead to the other and my thoughts were running wild. I started setting different goals to open another business selling home-made coconut bake and breads. With my achievements, I am looking forward to setting new goals.



Tree by
Caroline
Wang

Giving Up is Not an Option

Lianne Ayres

My new normal is different from pre-covid normal because there were a lot of changes. Now that the pandemic is over, life certainly looks a lot different than it once did. I started going out more regularly - visiting friends and family, going to the beach, to the mall and to parties and even to the play park with my kids and lots more.

As time went by, I thought that I was still in a pandemic at a point in time because I was facing a lot of challenges in my daily life. I was struggling to make ends meet. I thought that asking for help is a sign of weakness and didn't want anyone to see that I was struggling. Sometimes we need help and don't know how to ask. But, no matter how big or small the issue might be, as an adult I have a role to play in my kids' lives.

My only alternative was to accept support to make sure that my kids had a better life. During that period, my greatest strength was God. As I was struggling, He was there for me in so many ways. I am thankful for the love and support from my friends, family, teachers and the Police Youth Club.

My normal would be difficult because of my son. He was having seizures every month so I had to leave my job to be a stay-at-home mom. This is how my dreams died and my goals became unreachable. Gradually life became a routine without depth and meaning. Then new obstacles came my way and I stopped pursuing my dreams again. I was full of despair and anger for my own helplessness. Sometimes I think that I would be happy if all my dreams come true. It's the process of achieving my goals and the road towards my dreams that enrich and make me happy.

I know that life is very challenging for me right now. Although it might be tough, giving up is not an option. I've trusted God for too long. Even though my way is rough, he keeps me safe and strong. I know that God is on my side and soon victory and success will be mine because I am a warrior of my dreams, a knight of my goals and a soldier of my success.

General Tips for Student Writers

By Donna Jones

Donna Jones is a student leader who also loves to write. She developed a workshop by students for students called “Writer to Writer.” Donna was an Honors Award winner for *Women’s Perspectives #1* for her essay “Better Self Esteem Can Create Better Health.” She has participated on the Selection Committee for several years. These are some suggestions for student writers who want to participate in *Women’s Perspectives*.



There are 3 parts to writing.

Prewriting:

a stage for collecting everything together

1. A good thing to think about before even getting started is to make a list of reasons for sending your writing to *Women’s Perspectives*.
 - a. List the type of things that will stop you from sending in your entry. Sometimes when things get hard or people get upset with a project, they quit. I don’t want to see this happen to you.
 - b. Now list what you will do if one of these problems does happen.
 - c. You can keep adding to these lists. Please don’t let anything get in your way.
2. Pick the right time of day and place to do your writing.
3. Your brain is like a muscle and it needs to get warmed up. This exercise will loosen it up: Just write whatever pops into

- your head. You can use a computer or paper. Remember your writing doesn't have to make sense or be correct. You can write, "I can't think of anything to write or I hate this exercise." Just keep the words flowing for 3 - 5 minutes.
4. Keep a notebook & pen handy during the day to write down ideas and thoughts. Also keep it by your bed at night.
 5. Get all the things together that you will need for this project before you start to write (paper, pens, erasers, dictionary, thesaurus). So you won't have an excuse to stop.

Writing:

a stage of organizing things/putting them on paper

1. Review your notes. Remember you don't have to use all of them.
2. Always have a good opening sentence or paragraph. Something that will get your readers to want to read more of your writing.
3. Write from your heart. BE HONEST! Write how you feel. If you feel like crying then make your readers want to cry. Get your readers to react to your story.
4. Your last paragraph is as important as your first paragraph. You want your readers walking away remembering what you wrote. Don't leave them guessing. Remember how a good ending makes the movie good and a bad ending can ruin it.

Editing:

a stage for making sentences stronger and providing additional details to engage readers' attention

1. Put your story away for at least 24 hours. Then read it aloud. While reading it, ask yourself: does it sound clear, does it make sense, did I put a comma where I took a breath? Give it to your teacher or tutor to correct.
2. Give it to a different person to read. Someone, who you haven't talked to about this writing. Also, give her the call to write from WE LEARN. Ask her, "Does my writing make sense, does it fit the topic?" Ask: "How did you react when you were reading it?"
3. It may take several rewriting sessions before you get it the right way.
4. Most Importantly: Don't give up!!!!!!
5. Be sure to make a copy of what you wrote and file it away. It is something you should be proud of.

Finishing Your Work for Publication

Each year, WE LEARN receives many writings to consider for publication in *Women's Perspectives*. It is not possible for us to print them all, so the selection committee reads each writing very carefully. We make our selections based on the finished quality of the work (grammar, spelling, etc). More importantly, though, we consider the "voice" of the student writers.

- Has the student writer told us something from her/his unique perspective or experience?
- Has the writer clearly expressed an opinion or told an interesting story or helped the reader to come



to some new ideas or understanding?

-Has the writer thoughtfully addressed the theme?

Please share your work with friends and colleagues.

Perhaps students can create a peer-writing and editing group. Here are some steps to take in such a group.

1. Read your writing to your peer group.
2. “Interview” the listeners (students in the peer group). The writer should ask the listeners the questions, but not respond. The listeners should answer as full as they can in the moment. Here are some sample questions:
 - a. What words or phrases stood out to you?
(Just the words, not the meanings)
 - b. What message did you hear?
 - c. What were you thinking or feeling when you heard this writing?
3. The writer can then listen to these ideas and make changes or re-write the piece according to the comments in order to make it closer to what the writer wants to say.

Checklists

We have created checklists to assist writers in creating quality writing worthy of publishing. In addition to the categories on grammar, there is a section for interest. While writing may be technically correct, it is important to note that the *Women’s Perspectives* Committee must evaluate the “publish-ability” of a work. Consider these questions:

- Is it interesting or original?
- Would someone want to read this?

Women's Perspectives Writer's Checklist: Essay/Memoir

INTEREST

1. Addresses the theme for *Women's Perspectives*?
2. Is the topic interesting?
3. Is the topic original?
4. Has the writer expressed something unique about the topic?
5. Are there enough details to paint a picture for the reader?
6. Are descriptive/rich words /vocabulary used?
7. Is the reader encouraged towards reflection?
8. *If applicable to the writing*, can the reader identify or feel the writer's emotions?
9. *If this is expository writing*, can the reader understand or be challenged by the writer's opinion or point of view?

STRUCTURE/GRAMMAR

1. Are sentences complete?
2. Are words spelled correctly?
3. *If applicable*, are paragraphs clearly defined?
4. Are the thoughts organized clearly and logically?
5. Is there sentence variety?
6. Is the correct punctuation used?

Women's Perspectives Writer's Checklist: Poetry

INTEREST

1. Addresses the theme *Women's Perspectives*?
2. Is the topic interesting?
3. Is the topic original?



4. Has the writer expressed something unique about the topic?
5. Are there enough details to paint a picture for the reader?
6. Are descriptive/ rich words/ vocabulary used?
7. Can the reader identify or feel the writer's emotions?
8. Is the reader encouraged to reflect?

FORM/FORMAT

1. Can the writing be identified as a poem?
2. *If applicable*, does the poem properly use the stated form (e.g., Haiku)
3. Are words spelled correctly?
4. Are the thoughts organized and meaningful?
5. Does the poem flow?



Rose Colored
Pencil
by Caroline Wang