





# ***The Infinite Imagination of Time***

**Story by: Olivia Rathsack, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

*You never know how much time you have spent on the nonsensical, the trivial, the petty until it becomes your only currency. The pandemic arrived like a tsunami, rushing waters tearing and destroying everything in its path. Work, school, and community events vanish into thin air. Who knew the world could be so drastically changed in the span of what seemed like minutes?*

*I was in my freshman year of college when I was suddenly thrust back home into a world of online learning and communication. Although online learning was difficult and most of my professors had no idea how to restructure their classes, I began to notice the time. The time that I had lost that very same semester enclosing myself in my dorm room, not wanting to begin anew yet again. Regretting the missed opportunities to traverse the town and discover new experiences that would allow me to further explore myself. While reigniting my deep-rooted adoration of the wizarding world, I found myself wishing for Hermione's time turner, so I could go back and do all the things that I could no longer do for fear of the virus.*

*I began to feel overwhelmed by the amount of time I now had. I had lists and lists of things that I have been wanting to accomplish, things that I have been wanting to learn, read, watch, write, create. It was a cornucopia of endless possibilities, and I had to dive in if I ever wanted to make any progress. I went for my first love, the thing I knew would bring me joy in a time where joy was hard to come by: reading. I had a bookshelf stacked with unread books, and I consumed them as if they were air. Red, White, and Royal Blue, Crescent City, An Ember in the Ashes, Turtles All the Way Down, and many more dousing my anxieties in fantastical realms, cheesy romances, and other people's problems. One after another, I read and read, submerging myself in fictional worlds and problems and wishing for the time before everything turned upside down, for the time when everything made sense.*

*I began to create. I painted clay pots covered in flora and canvases portraying life and vibrancy. I wrote poetry and drafted ideas for a book I have always wanted to write about elves and a mythical world of pirates, heartbreak, war, and found family. I wanted to make something beautiful in a gray lifeless world, and I started to live in my imagination, in a world that was not my own. Whether that was through TV shows and movies I had never carved out time to watch, through my art, or the stories I was reading and writing. I realized I was attempting to escape the harsh realities of my life that only a few weeks ago was completely normal. Yet I felt so much freedom in my actions. I no longer felt like Atlas bearing the weight of the entire sky on my shoulders.*

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**Artists:**

**Christopher Ehlert, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

**Kaela Greenfield, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

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# ***A New Kind of Family***

**Story by: Chloe Falcon, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

*When I remember the COVID-19 pandemic my mind goes to rapid closures, faces armored in masks, and nightmares. And of course, ramen noodles, knitting, and Marvel movies: some of my favorite ways to pass the time during the “Safer at Home” order.*

*When the United States was thrown into a rapid lockdown, my university closed its physical doors as well. By the hundreds, students filled up suitcases and fled, uncertain when they would return, leaving a few of us behind. In 2020 I was living in one of the dorms on campus and working as an RA. If we chose to, we could stay on campus and continue to work and complete our nightly rounds in mostly empty buildings. I was one of the few who chose this option. Eau Claire had become my home, and if I was going to quarantine, I wanted to do so in the comfort of my home.*

*I spent my days alone, gazing out my window at an empty parking lot that had felt so full a lifetime ago. Mornings I had classes, staring at empty spaces where student’s faces should be, but were often blacked out, microphones muted. A chorus of silence. Lunch brought a trip down two flights of stairs to the lobby of my dorm, where I collected my prepackaged meal to be eaten alone in my room.*

*I lived for the night. As soon as classes were over and we were done with our work for the day, I would grab my knitting basket, a quarantine hobby I had picked up, and meet up in the basement of Towers Residence Hall with one of my coworkers Allie and an RA named Mengcha from another dorm. Mengcha was determined to watch the entirety of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and he chose us to complete this with. I have no memory as to how or why this began; I had just met Mengcha a few days before the lockdown, but these nights became my saving grace. We would meet in the basement, pull in these big comfy chairs, line them up side-by-side in front of the TV, and pile on the blankets. I enjoyed living beside such few people in a building meant to hold half of the freshman class. There was no need to plan and reserve the TV lounge; we were the only ones there to enjoy it.*

*We watched the movies in order of release date, not chronological order, something that at the time seemed very important to Mengcha. Before the movie started, we would make ramen in the microwave of the kitchen in the room next door. We would take our ramen, cozy up, and play whatever movie was next on the list.*

*As the months passed, my blanket grew longer, and my love of Marvel movies and these two friends grew stronger. During these nights, I was home. Not a home with my family but a home I created with two people who weeks before had been practically strangers to me, and who now felt like family.*

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**Artists:**

**Erin Phelps, Student**

**University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

**Natalia Sexton, Student**

**University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

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# ***The Perspective Warrior***

**Story by: Avery Benson, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

*When I think back to 2018, I recall how passionate, encouraged, and empowered I felt when starting my first year of college. I was an older sister, daughter, first-generation, African American woman, and a college student! I started to feel more firmly the responsibility to cut off the ropes of struggle and inequity tethered to the stories of my ancestors. I was defying odds and inspiring others, so of course I had hope that the world would open itself up to me. No dream of mine would be faltered. My mind swirled with naive thoughts of 'control over every situation', and never accepting words like 'fail'. I felt strength. I was confident. Empowered by the sense of freedom dwindling at my fingertips.*

*Then the beginning of 2021, twenty-two years young and most days my eyes would flutter open already wondering what the purpose was to wake up in the first place. Aside from assignments and the daily news updates blaring from the TV upstairs (because yes, I moved back home to sleep in my parents' basement for all of quarantine), it felt as if there was no reason to do anything. The world—my world—was upheaval. There was a sense of chaos, not only from the constant bombardment of TV and social media streams that permeated every area of life, but the self-confrontation that came with loss of control and the whispers of hopelessness that began to torment me and the tangibility of my dreams. I became depressed. The indestructible me, the confident me, the me that was whole had been jabbed by the strain of isolation, loneliness, and loss of motivation until all of a sudden, I felt as if I had completely lost myself. I had dreams, attainable dreams it once felt like, all of which required connection and communication. I fantasized about exploring networking events, new fashion styles, performing poetry, visiting jazz clubs, traveling to visit my significant other in his country, meeting my inspirations in person, and well, the list could go on. I yearned to feel places, smell places, to be in community. I had a dream to live, but most days it just felt like I was surviving, as I'm sure it did for most of us.*

*With 2022 approaching, I begin to reflect. Perspective has grown to be my closest friend and accountability partner. Perspective has taught me that the world can be turned upside down, but it's still possible to go on. I find myself considering others' circumstances more frequently because we've all been faced with some kind of affliction. Some of us even face the rising weights of injustice. So now it's a must—I have to look deeper. The pandemic was hard—is hard—for all of us, but I have hope that this hardship will create a strength in us that is unimaginable. We are powerful people. Though we've been tattered, confused, and hurt, we've also been prompted to acknowledge the importance of human connection. The value that comes from seeing people for who they are, not for who we assume them to be. COVID-19 catapulted me into a time where my dreams were forced to meet reality. Though, in ways that almost seem unnatural, I have become grateful for how my body is now distinctly carved by perseverance and compassion. Because yes, I have been tired, I have been overwhelmed, and I have been hopeless, but I will not drown in the tides of unfamiliarity. I am a warrior. We are warriors.*

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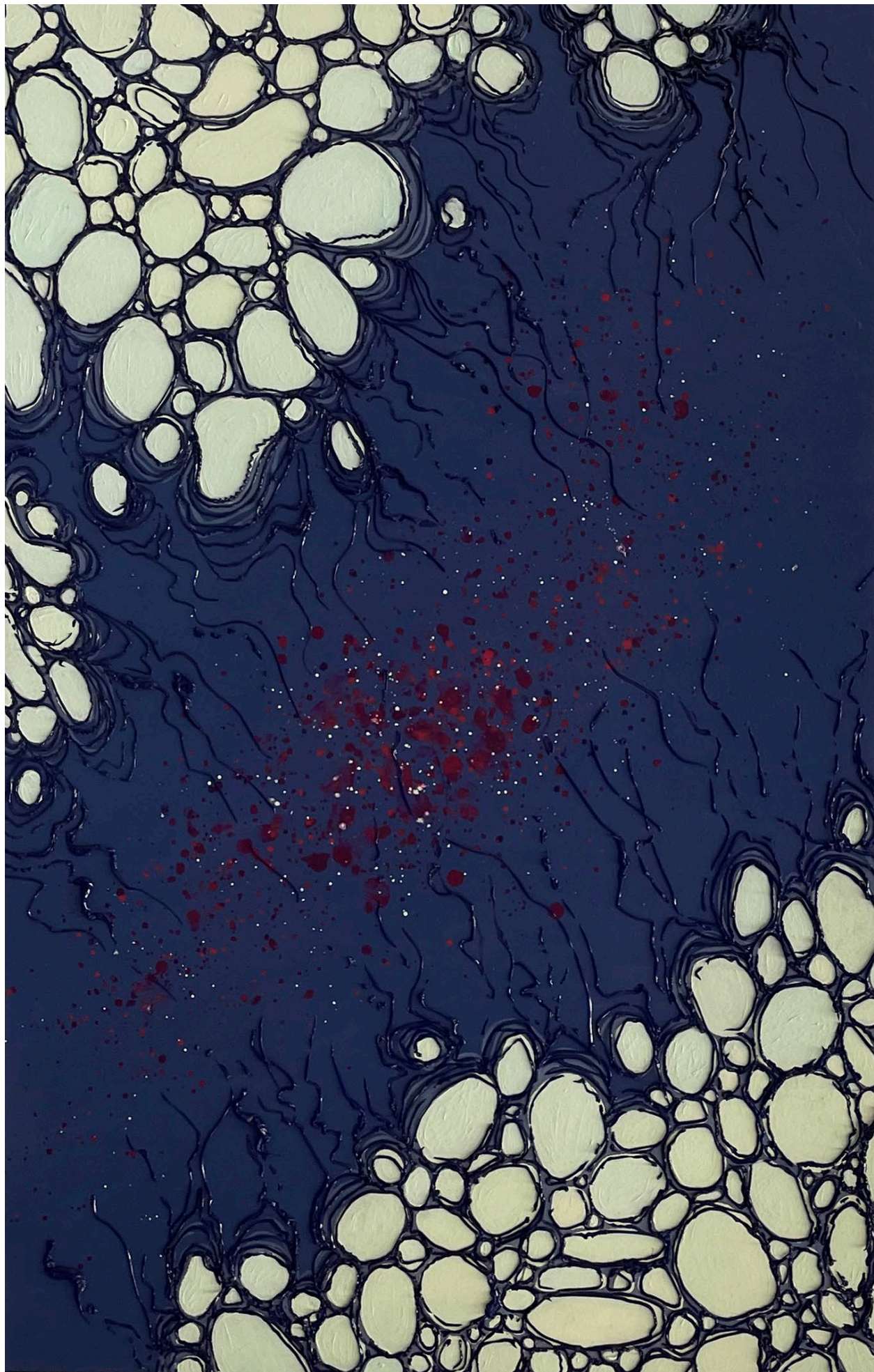
**Artist:**

**Jordan Witzel, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

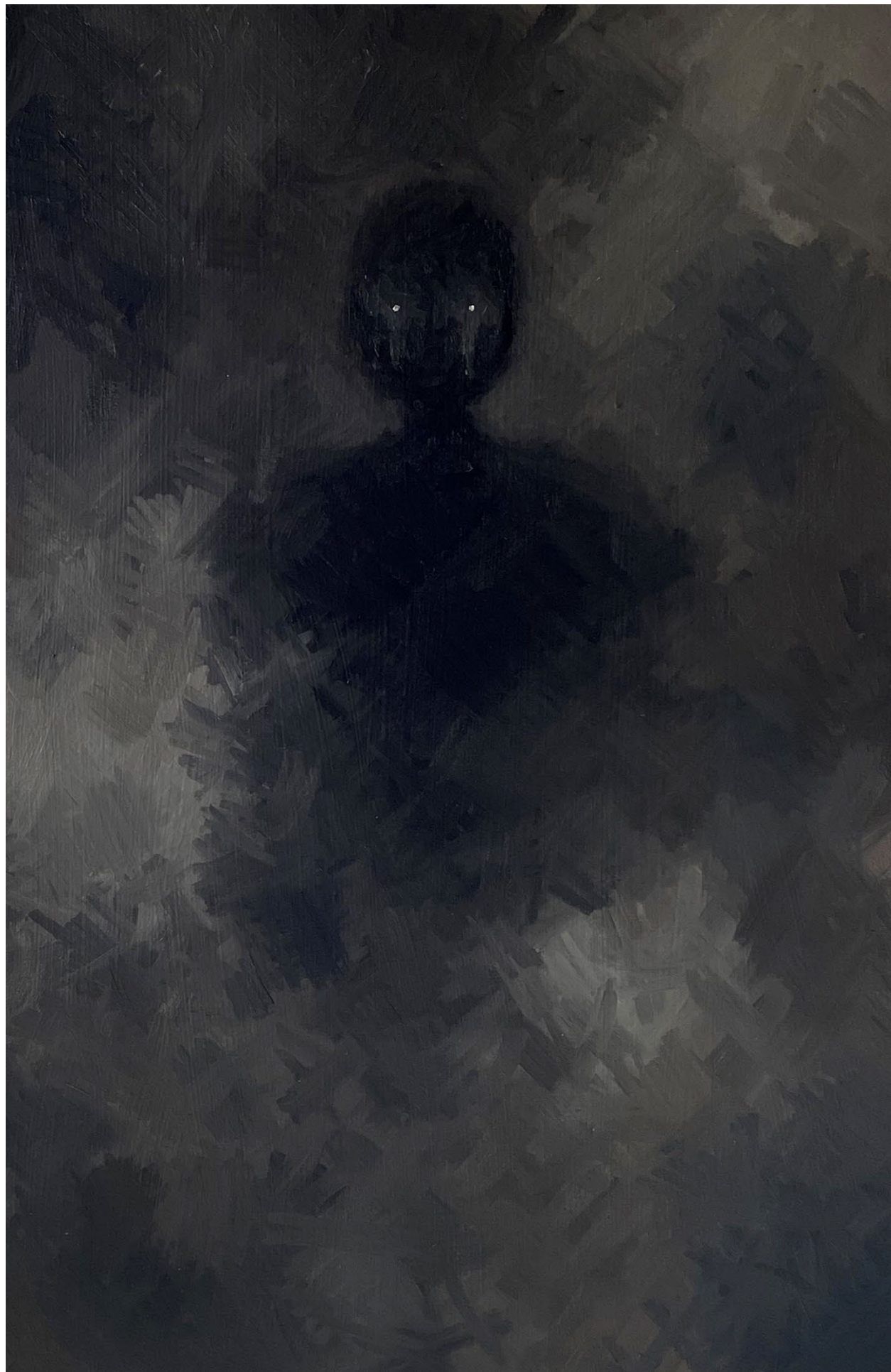
**Joshua Yang, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

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# ***Hope Is Virtual Office Hours***

**Story by: Stephanie Turner, Professor  
Department of English  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

*Sitting here in my bunker—I mean, basement; no, I mean, office—I’m ready at the laptop. Ready to receive earnest students with challenging questions about my carefully crafted assignments, now adapted to our COVID-19 all-digital classroom-slash-office. There, we can talk through our screens face-to-face in real time, almost as good as actual office hours in my actual office back at school. Almost.*

*I’m charged up, logged in, have all the necessary tabs open: our classroom “management system,” my work email, a couple of websites students need for homework, Gmail . . .*

*But, as I just posted over on Facebook while waiting for my first visitor for today’s virtual office hours, “I’ve been having trouble concentr”*

*I click on the New York Times tab, always there at the far left, forever updating. “Cases near 2 million,” one headline sighs. “Global Economy Faces Worst Slump Since Great Depression,” shouts another. Wait! What was that? Did I hear someone logging on? I click on the “Welcome” tab for my virtual office hours. Nope. I’m still the only one in the “room.”*

*All they have to do to get my attention when they enter my virtual office is say the password, “bananagrams” for one class, “monsters R us” and “all we need is science” for the other two, respectively. I’m trying to make this fun, this social distance learning. I hope somebody shows up soon.*

*Over in my Gmail account, more bad news. Something else important has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Something that wasn’t even supposed to happen until June. June! I thought for sure that was far enough out that we could, at least cautiously, start to ditch social distancing. Uh-oh. There’s that funny sprung spring noise. I click back over to my virtual office. “Are you still there?” My virtual office is talking to me now. I click the button that means “yes.”*

*Virtual office hours remind me that most of us are clicking the buttons that mean “yes” now, each of us in our own ways. Yes, despite the suffering and death wrought by this new jot of protein, a great many of us are still here. We are showing up for each other now in surprising new ways. Zoom yoga. Virtual happy hour. Music and games shared from platform to digital platform.*

*“Hello?” A hesitant voice calls from my laptop. Apparently this is someone who forgot the password. No matter! I pounce on the microphone button. “Hello! Can you hear me?” I’m desperate for the contact. “How are you?” I hit the video button. There we are!*

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**Artists:**

**Kierstyn Anglemyer, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

**Sydney Beckfield, Student  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

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