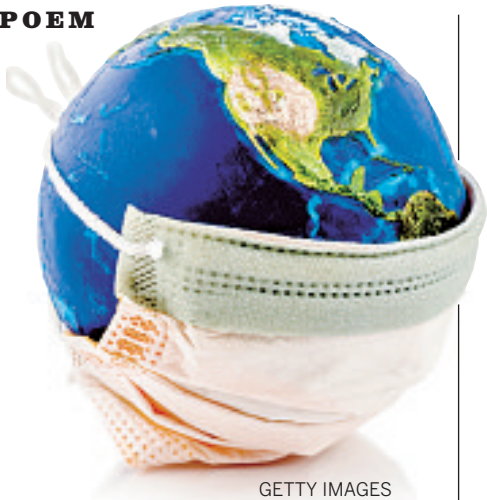


YOUR WORDS

POEM



CORONAVIRUS
COPING &
CONFLICT

Coronavirus, Covid-19 —
a Global Pandemic

Unfathomable

We shelter in place

Quarantine. Isolate.

Hair turns colors
and grows longer

Food gets scarcer

Tempers may flare
(then subside)

Our kids are not
themselves,
we are not ourselves,
our partners are not
themselves

We watch news
conferences (yet they
STILL aren't 6 feet apart,
hands continue to touch
the podium)!

Positive tests.
Numbers mounting.
Lack of equipment.
Unsure of treatment.

Health care providers
of all specialties and levels
without PPE!
Their lives also at risk!

Flatten the curve.

Online learning.
Zoom meetings and
classes. Don't go here.
Don't go there.

Milestones missed ...
Proms unheard of.
Graduations rescheduled.
Stores closing.

Deaths mounting.
Deaths looming?
Unnecessary deaths!

Is this the new normal or
merely the abnormal?

We wait and watch and
wonder and hope ...

Will this all be resolved?
WHEN?

We are unaware

We are uncertain

We get anxious

We are stressed!

Why are we uncertain?

Why aren't we aware?

Why all this stress?

Susan J. Farese, RN, veteran, writer/poet and educator, Carmel Valley

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HOW COVID-19
UPENDED THE
LITERARY WORLD

CARY LOWE: AUTHORS ARE HURTING WITHOUT TOURS AND BOOKSTORES

April 30 should have been one of the most exciting days of my life. My publisher had set that as the release date for my book “Becoming American.” I have published dozens of essays and professional articles, but this would be my first full-length book.

The book is a political memoir chronicling my growing up in post-war Europe with parents who were Holocaust survivors, immigrating to the U.S., serving in the military, working on campaigns and causes, having a lengthy career as a lawyer and academic, and overall becoming a politically engaged American. Along the way, I had the opportunity to work with such prominent political figures as Robert Kennedy, George McGovern, Jerry Brown and Tom Hayden.

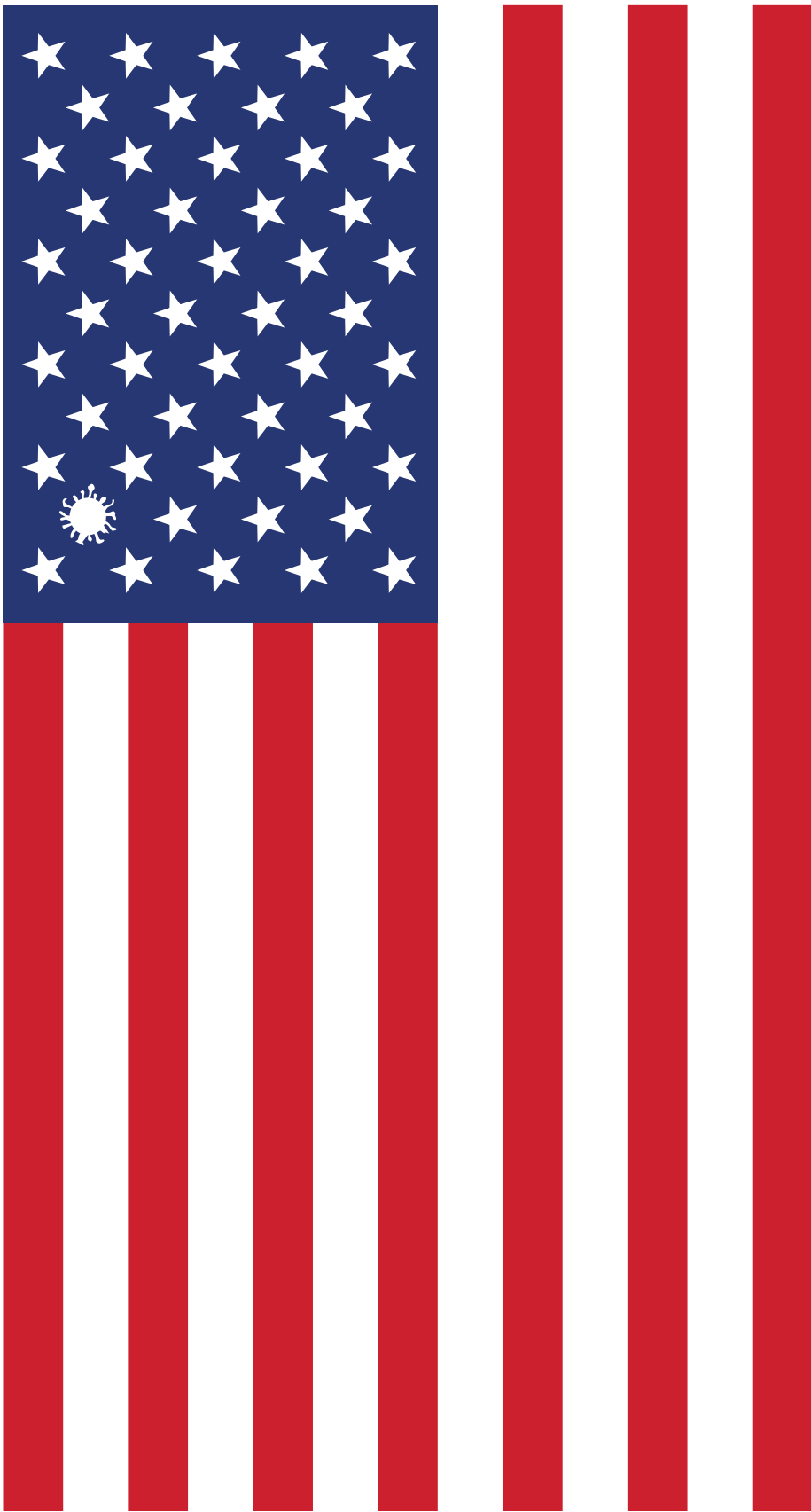
The release date seemed particularly timely in light of the ongoing controversies over immigration and the meaning of being a real American, all of which I expected would resume prominence in this year’s election campaigns. So, back in January, I began preparing a press kit of a book summary, a news release and an author bio, to be sent along with a digital version of the book to reviewers throughout the country. I created a website and a Facebook page to showcase the book. Friends and colleagues helped me assemble lengthy email lists of people in particular demographics whom I expected to be interested.

Then COVID-19 struck. As a devoted consumer of national and international news, I had been following early reports of the pandemic since late last year. Arrival of the coronavirus didn’t surprise me, but I still felt blindsided by the speed and ferocity with which it spread. In short order, we saw and experienced entire sectors of the economy and civil society shut down — offices, retail businesses, manufacturing plants, restaurants, theaters, athletic arenas, schools, libraries, even many medical offices. Any place where workers or consumers were likely to have close physical contact, and not deemed essential. Virtually overnight, those able to do so transitioned to working from home.

But what about people who already worked from home, yet relied on those now-closed establishments to promote and sell their products? Like writers.

I had already spent the last 15 years of my legal career working from a home office, so transitioning to writing felt seamless. A different story prevailed outside my home. Bookstores where I hoped to hold readings and sell my work all closed. The same with libraries. Book groups through which I might promote the book stopped meeting. Entertainment publications closed down. Organizers canceled literary conferences, including one in New York at which I was to receive an award for my book. And public attention dwelt on news about the spread of the pandemic and possible cures, to the exclusion of almost anything else.

The only good news for writers has been that a homebound population is reading more. Also watching more movies and television shows, but that primes them for author interviews and book discussions by Zoom or Facebook. With the vast majority of books being sold online even before the pandemic, sales have increased slightly. However, in the same way that musicians need to tour to promote their latest albums, even



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Like writers.

though most sales happen online, writers need to appear before physical audiences to promote their books. Especially new or less-known writers. In an era when self-publishing swamps the literary market, Stephen King and J.K. Rowling may keep selling huge numbers of books, but thousands of other quality authors desperately need attention, just to break through the background noise and let the public know their work is out there.

As all levels of government gradually ease stay-at-home orders, we can expect some improvement in the literary situation. Not very quickly, though. Patrons need to feel comfortable about returning to bookstore aisles. Libraries need to devise workable social-distancing plans. Book groups won’t be able to squeeze into someone’s living room. And the public, newly liberated from the lockdown, likely will drop their books in favor of outdoor recreation and in-person socializing.

I understand that urge to return to a familiar style and quality of life. At the same time, I feel bewildered at the inability of many people to cooperate with what could be lifesaving measures. My mother spent three

years hiding for her life from the Nazis who murdered most of her family. What would she make of people unwilling to give up surfing or barhopping for a few months to protect themselves, their families and their communities?

And the worst may be yet to come. Scientists and medical authorities predict a resurgence of the virus in places that reopen too quickly and a second wave of infections later in the year just as we will have become accustomed to a new normal. If either of those occur, workplaces, stores, libraries and all the rest will close once more. With those closures may again come a marginal rise in reading and book sales, but at what price? I don’t want to feel like it took someone else’s death to make my book more successful.



Lowe is an award-winning San Diego writer who has published over 50 essays in The San Diego Union-Tribune and other major newspapers. His book “Becoming American” was published earlier this year by Black Rose. For more about Lowe and his book, go to carylowlower.com.