

CALIFORNIA  
STATE  
LIBRARY  
FOUNDATION

Number 130  
2021

# Bulletin

## CALIFORNIA STATE FAIR



## SACRAMENTO



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STATE  
LIBRARY  
FOUNDATION

Number 130  
2021

# Bulletin

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**Back Cover:** Opening page of Issue Number 1, May 24, 1870, of *The Trans-Continental*.

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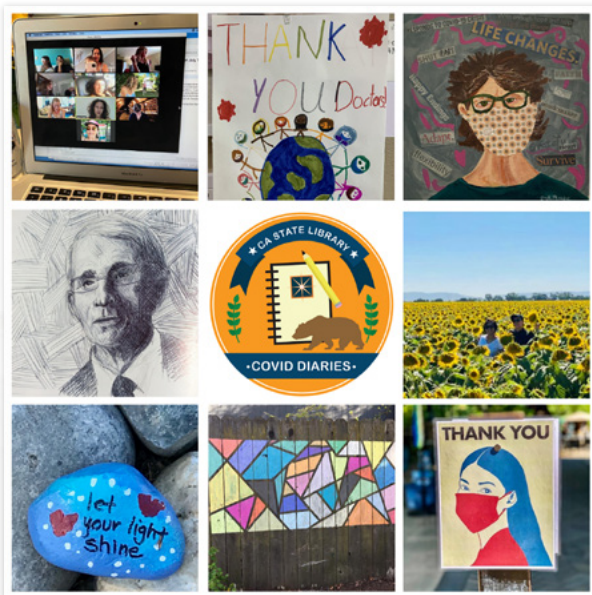
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# The Diary of a Year Like No Other

*By Alex Vassar and Jamie Romas*



The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of daily life, at home, at work, and in our communities. At the beginning of 2020, no one could have foretold the extent to which our lives would change.

Although rumors of a coming crisis had been circulating for weeks, the first firm suggestion of an impending lockdown came on March 13. By the following Friday, virtually all of the State Library's staff had been transitioned to remote telework. The change was abrupt and it was shocking. Even those of us who had worked for the state for years had never seen such a drastic shift happen that quickly.

In April, some Library staff began having scattered conversations about how to best ensure that the Library could continue to capture the story of California as the COVID-19 pandemic raged. Inspiration struck when Mattie Taormina, director of the Sutro Library, related the story of Samuel Pepys, a member of Parliament, whose journal recorded life in London during the bubonic plague outbreak of 1665. What made Pepys's writings important was not that he was a doctor (he wasn't) or that his descriptions included detailed statistics about the spread of the disease (they didn't). Instead, it was the way in which his casual, first-person account, clearly written for his own personal reference, gives readers insight into his world as he experienced it.

The State Library quickly put out a call to everyday Californians to create and submit their own COVID journals, reflecting their experiences and feelings during the pandemic. Hundreds of people from all parts of the state responded, submitting not just journal entries but poems, short stories, photographs, videos, and works of art. Since the launch of the California COVID Diaries, the Library has received more than 400 submissions from Californians of all ages and backgrounds reflecting on topics ranging from baking bread and distance learning to coping with a cancer diagnosis during a pandemic.

We're pleased to share some of the submissions that were received. If you're interested in seeing more or contributing your own original work, please visit the California COVID Diaries website at <https://covididiaries.library.ca.gov>.



*Alex Vassar is the Communications Manager for the California State Library. Prior to his arrival at the Library, Alex worked for both houses of the California Legislature and the State Board of Equalization. He is the author of the recently published California Lawmaker: The Men and Women of the California State Legislature.*

*Jamie Romas is the Special Assistant to the State Librarian. Prior to the Library, Jamie worked for then-Attorney General Kamala Harris. Jamie is a graduate of UC Berkeley and Emory University School of Law.*



Gayle Manfre, Sonoma

“

I hope that cancer and COVID-19 continue to keep me present and remind me of the solace of time with friends and family in whatever form that takes and to remind me to be grateful for each day that I get to smell air that hints at the ocean and watch the clouds scuttle across the sky. Maybe by the time you read this there will be a better treatment for cancer. Maybe humans will have figured out how to mitigate climate change. Maybe being stuck means we'll come up with better ways to become unstuck. I hope so.

SUSAN BUMPS, EL CERRITO





Pacifica M., Pasadena

“

I like staying home with my parents and sister. I get to play Legos with my sister and read lots of books. My birthday is in March and we cannot go out but my mom baked me a yummy cake. I love my family and we're okay staying home.

GAVIN, SAN JOSE

## 1. The COVID-19 Blues

May 3, 2020

I was laid off from my job  
Now it's hard to make ends meet  
I'm tired of waiting in lines  
That go all the way down the street  
I've got the blues  
I've got the COVID-19 Blues  
I'm low on toilet paper  
And it's nowhere in the store  
It can't go on like this  
I just can't take it anymore  
I've got the blues  
I've got the COVID-19 Blues  
I'm all cooped up at home  
I'm so stressed that I could shout  
My mask is making me sweat  
And now my skin is breaking out  
I've got the blues  
I've got the COVID-19 Blues

*Submitted by Paula Gemme, Los Angeles County – Monrovia.*

## 2. Full Stop

April 20, 2020

The city that never sleeps is taking a nap.  
Streets are empty.  
Restaurants are for take-out only.  
Bars are closed.  
Theaters are dark every day.  
Streets have no traffic jams.  
Times Square is quiet.  
Shops are closed.  
Churches are empty.  
A New York minute now takes  
a full 60 seconds.

*Submitted by Josephine Mele, Contra Costa County – Moraga.*



### 3. Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Dixie Albright, 84 (pictured below), visited her daughter's home for an Easter gathering. We set a table for her far away from all of us to keep her from getting exposed. Due to Covid restrictions, she was unable to visit her husband in his memory care facility and we invited her to our house to boost her spirits.

It was clear from the start that COVID-19 could be deadly for the elderly. I remember having hard conversations with my 84-year-old mother about what this would mean for her life over the coming year. We could not bear the idea of something happening to her.

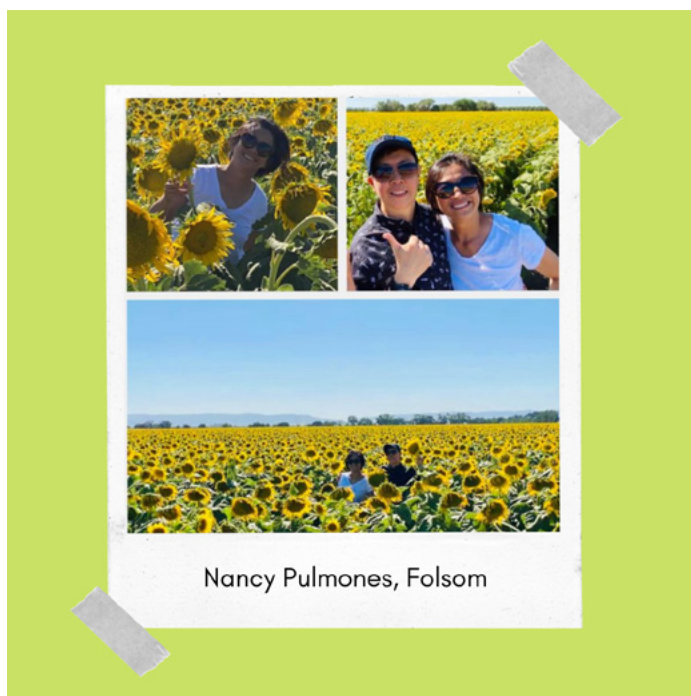


She is a vivacious woman with longevity in her family and we all want her to be with us for another 20 years. We had begun taking precautions in March, with social distancing at work and delivering her groceries to her on the weekend. Despite the texting, I knew my mom was lonely as she was longing for human contact. So we devised a way to celebrate Easter in our backyard without her coming near us or coming in the house.

It was strange and wonder-

ful, and worth it for us to be together. Eventually, she fixed up her own patio with two tables set far apart so that we could visit her for dinner, also keeping our distance. For younger generations, a year and a half of quarantine is hard but not insurmountable. We felt lucky to have our jobs and not be facing economic hardship. But when you are closer to the end of your life, withdrawing from society for such a long time is a bigger loss. I think at that age, you know how precious the years are. Now, in June, my mom has ventured out three times – two doctors appointments and a haircut. She will not join us on a trip to the Sierras, and she's not allowed to visit my dad/her husband in his care home. Because his brain is failing him, he does not know anything about COVID-19 or why his loved ones can only visit him on the screen of a telephone. We are not sure we will see him again before he passes away, which is very hard. But it's just another way that COVID-19 has affected all of us.

*Submitted by Amy Palmer, Sacramento County – Sacramento.*



“

Quarantine, life slows, time  
seems uncertain

Traffic sounds intermittent and  
strangely hushed

Bird song is beautiful, suddenly  
loud!

KATHLEEN CEJKA, REDLANDS