



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ETAI News

Letter from the Chair	Bridget Schvarcz	4
Letter from the Editors	Karen Guth & Lisa Marti Leebhoff	5
Letter to the Editors		
What Carona Taught Us	Shoshana Smith	6

Personal Perspectives

New Beginnings and New Surprises	Kinneret Ozeri	7
Literature During Lockdown		
Creating A Creative (Writing) Corona Class	Emmy Leah Zitter	9
EAP Corona Tales From An Engineering College	Sara Huber, Malka Regev, Nurit Bassry-Klejman, Gili Brenner, Rachel Wohlfarth, Miriam Shitzer, Keren Khrizman, Bridget Schvarcz	14

Blended Responses

The Covid-19 Education Metaphors	Erin Henriksen Losebashvili	15
The Student-Centered Pedagogical Playground	Timna Hurwich	18

Strategies

Pay It Forward	Sandra Rossen Larey	22
Online Teaching During Covid 19 and Leadership	Charmian Abelson-Lezmy	23
Will Covid-19 Change The Future Of Teaching and Specifically Teaching 'Model UN'	Daniel Gindis	24

From Our Affiliates

Building A Stronger Teacher Student Relationship In Online English Language Classes	Siqi Song	27
Practical Solutions For Building Community In Online Language Classrooms	Michael D. Winans	28
Distance Learning		
How Can We Improve Upon Support For ELS	Annette Zehler	29

From Our Members

Ode to the English Bagrut	Rena London	31
---------------------------------	-------------------	----



National Chairperson	Bridget Schvarcz		
Vice Chair	Lisa Marti Leebhoff and Tracy Piada		
Treasurer	Debbie Lifschitz		
Office Manager	Karen Berzon		
National Executive Committee			
	Maizie Avihayil	Sara Huber	Tracy Piada
	Nihad Aweidah	Lisa Marti Leebhoff	
	Michele Ben	Debbie Lifschitz	
	Ella Ben Emanuel	Isme Moss	
Past Chairs	Raphael Gefen	Brenda Liptz	Mitzi Geffen
	Elite Olshtain	Nava Horovitz	Michele Ben
	Natalie Hess	Susan Holzman	Eleanor Satlow
	Eveline Ezra	Penny Ur	Susan Bedein
	Ephraim Weintraub		
Editors	Karen Guth, Lisa Marti Leebhoff		
Advertising	Karen Berzon		
Layout	Eric Cohen Books		

The *ETAI Forum* is published by ETAI (English Teachers' Association of Israel)
 POB 36206, Jerusalem, 9136101. Tel: 02-5001844; e-mail: etaioffice@gmail.com;
 Website: www.etai.org.il ISSN 2409-188X

ETAI Mission Statement

Our mission is to enrich and empower English language educators and to promote professionalism in English teaching at all levels of the educational system in Israel.

ETAI Statement of Purpose

ETAI (English Teachers' Association of Israel) is a grassroots, voluntary organization concerned with the professional development of its close to 1000 members. ETAI members work in all sectors and at all levels of education – elementary, junior high and secondary school, college and university.

ETAI offers professional support, information, forums for discussion and practical suggestions and resources to help English teachers deepen their expertise and grow in their careers through its local events, regional and national conferences and its journal, the ETAI Forum.

The aim of all the organization's activities is to enable teachers to seek the appropriate avenues to keep up-to-date with the latest research in the field, materials, methodologies and technology essential for their lives as English language teachers.

It is our job as a teachers' association to supply a variety of arenas to foster professionalism. These include organizing events throughout the country, keeping in touch with the English Inspectorate and the Ministry of Education and maintaining our connections with international English teachers' organizations as an affiliate of TESOL and an associate of IATEFL.

ETAI Membership Dues

Members	200 NIS
Full-time students (must present a valid student ID card)	150 NIS
New immigrants / New teachers / Retirees	150 NIS
Group membership (2-7 teachers)	160 NIS each
Group membership (8 or more teachers)	150 NIS each
Overseas membership	\$70, €55

New member / Membership renewal form can be downloaded from the ETAI site:
etai.org.il

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Colleagues,

In the space of a very short time, the manner in which we conduct education around the world has changed, due to an obtrusive virus that transformed our lives within days. Educators have had to adapt to a new reality, and have turned towards distance learning as an alternative teaching method. While distance education tools are more developed than ever, there are still significant challenges to adopting remote teaching techniques and technologies.

This special issue is dedicated to the needs of English teachers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring how English teachers in Israel and abroad have addressed the challenges and opportunities of online instruction. The authors featured in this edition share their experiences on how this crisis impacted their own ELT practices.

I am proud to announce that the Forum has launched a 'From Our Affiliates' section in which we share the voices of teachers from our sister ELT associations. This issue features three articles provided by the Teacher Education Interest Section of TESOL.

The articles in this edition reinforce our sense of being educators: no matter the conditions, our mission is to impart the English language, and this period has shown us that we can adapt learning and readjust our teaching practices in an abruptly changing context.

In the future we will of course face new challenges but we must not forget our professional expertise while we embrace the technological changes guided by our experience during this pandemic.

Wishing us a fruitful academic year,

Bridget Schvarcz
ETAI Chair
Head of the English Unit, Afeka College of Engineering

SAVE THE DATES



○ 1st Winter Mini Conference

Date: Monday, December 21, 2020
Location: Or Yehuda / Zoom
Topic: From Curriculum 2020 to the Classroom

○ Spring Conference

Date: Tuesday, March 23, 2021
Location: Hemdat Hadarom / Zoom
Topic: What a Difference a Year Makes

○ Student-Teacher Conference

Date: TBA – January or February 2021
Location: Zoom
Topic: Student Teacher Classroom Challenges

○ Summer Conference

Dates: TBA 2 days in July 2021
Location: Jerusalem / Zoom

○ 2nd Winter Mini Conference

Date: Wednesday, February 20, 2021
Location: Sur Bahar / Zoom
Topic: From Curriculum 2020 to the Classroom

○ Back to School Conference

Date: Tuesday, August 24, 2021
Location: Tiberias / Zoom

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear ETAI Community,

The challenges we continue to face as teachers during a worldwide pandemic are considerable. In this mini “Corona” edition some of our most gifted colleagues share their insights and ideas for overcoming and even thriving under our new circumstances.

We have added two new sections to the FORUM: Letters to the Editor and an Affiliates Section. Both these additions allow the FORUM to reflect the diversity in our backgrounds and experiences.

In Shoshana Smith’s letter to the Editor she shares with us some of the difficulties we face in our classroom and some of the positive advantages Covid 19 has brought to resolve them, mainly smaller class size and teacher helpers.

Section One, Personal Perspectives contains articles about the personal journeys educators and their students have taken. Kinneret Ozeri and Emmly Zitter share with us their stories of growth and hope that they and their students experienced during this unprecedented time. Finally, members of the English staff of Afeka College of Engineering tell us about the challenges and opportunities they faced while enduring distance education at the college level.

Section Two shares with us Covid-19 stories and the changes it motivated dedicated teachers to incorporate into their classrooms. Timna Hurwich regales us with her story of hope, building communities, both in and out of our classrooms and shares with us a most intuitive idea which brought together her pupils and her student teachers during and after the lockdown. Erin Henriksen Losebashvili, cleverly connects the measures we took and continue to take, to protect ourselves from infection, and applies them to sound pedagogical practices in our classrooms and in distant learning.

The third section is full of practical strategies that we can use in the upcoming years. Read about on-line teaching strategies and leadership during Covid 19 in Charmian Abelson-Lezmy’s piece which provides us with a myriad of ideas to apply to our teaching on-line this fall. Sandra Rossen Larey shares her experience as a PLC (professional learning community) leader, on how the Pisgat Ze’ev community in Jerusalem created a “Pay it Forward” program, a collaborative project for several schools in which the students did “Deeds of Loving Kindness” during the time the schools were closed. In Daniel Gindis’ article he shows how the Covid education experience offers educators practical tools so that we can meet the future needs of our students.

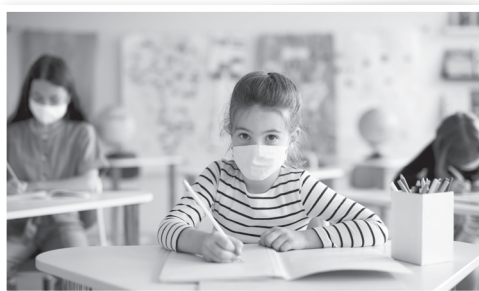
Our final section includes articles from our affiliates. Teacher Education Special Interest Section of TESOL, contribute to a forming a global perspective of online English classrooms. Annette Zehler shares tips on community-building, and Siqi Song offers ways to form stronger teacher-student relationships. Michael D. Winans reviews various digital learning resources and the types of support they may provide to our learners

These articles represent a sample of the resilience displayed by our EFL teachers and our students in Israel as well as our colleagues overseas. For every idea, every story and every success there are several more out there that we experienced this past semester. We have every confidence that as the new school year approaches; we will be prepared with a variety of new tools replete with ideas, strategies and a commitment to continue to connect, in a meaningful way, with all of our students.

We wish you all a good and productive new year and we encourage you to continue to stay in-touch with your English Teachers’ Community through the variety of ETAI programs this year, which began with the outstanding Summer Etai Virtual Conference. In addition, we invite you to submit articles to the Etai Forum about your experiences in our new “hybrid teaching reality” as well as the research that many of you continue to pursue.

Warm regards,

*Karen Guth
Lisa Marti Leebhoff*



LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Editors

WHAT CORONA TAUGHT US

I have submitted this letter in response to the Forum's request for articles about teaching during the Corona crisis.

I am here today to talk to everybody about our most cherished treasure- our children, the children for whom we wait nine months for them to be born. These are the children because of whom we lose sleep and become distressed because of their problems. If we see them fall, we are the first ones to help them up and kiss them and speak empathetically to help calm them down and dispel their fears.

For many of our children school is not an easy place to be. Learning is complicated and stressful. They are shy and afraid to speak up for fear of making a mistake and being laughed at. In many of our classrooms we have 30 or more students, bags all over the floor blocking the aisles, no helpers for teachers and students, and not enough computers.

However, much of this was changed with the creation of the "Corona Capsule" in our schools. Some of those examples are the following:

- A class has no more than 18 pupils.
- Each child gets to sit at his own desk with room for his bag underneath.
- There is a teacher's helper (or maybe 2-3 helpers) in every classroom.
- More theme oriented classrooms are available (English room, laboratory, math room etc.) with stimulating materials / learning games, pictures that inspire and simplify – reminders of what has been taught or will be taught, because the students are required to be in smaller learning groups
- More learning stations for interactive self-teaching, either in school or on the computer

Many solutions to overpopulated classrooms were found and instigated, thanks to Corona!

In conclusion, Corona came to teach us to face the facts. We need smaller capsules for learning and at least one teacher helper for each capsule. This is especially important for EFL classrooms. We need to give our children the chance to do well. They need more individualized attention in less populated classrooms.

Sincerely,

Shoshana Smith

Shoshana Smith has been teaching students on all levels from beginning up to Bagrut for over 24 years. Her latest focus is on helping LD students gain motivation to succeed at learning English. She currently teaches in Yahud and Ramla and is learning Noa Menashe's teaching methods. Her free time is dedicated to helping her grandchildren be successful English students. (shoshana2854@gmail.com)

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR THE ETAI FORUM

We are looking for contributions that cover topics of interest to ELL teachers at all levels, from young learners through university: practice-oriented articles that inspire and suggest improvements to teaching and learning. Here are some ideas:

- helpful information for professional development
- ideas for improving teaching
- sharing of personal growth experiences that have influenced your own teaching
- opinions based on experience and new ideas
- descriptions of programs
- Research-based solutions to problems with an emphasis on explaining and interpreting
- results, rather than on methodology.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES and EARNING GMUL CREDIT

can be found on our website <http://www.etai.org.il/share-etai-forum/>

NEW BEGINNINGS AND NEW SURPRISES

by Kinneret Ozeri (*kinneretoz77@gmail.com*)

Nobody has ever said that teaching is an easy career path. Anyone who has ever set foot in a classroom understands its emotional, physical and mental demands. In spite of these difficulties and various bumps along the road here and there, I have enjoyed fifteen years of magical and successful teaching. I have been able to take my students on memorable educational journeys and create an atmosphere that fostered curiosity, independence, and love.

I have always enjoyed the electricity that I felt every morning; excited about the day to come and the lives I would touch. All of this came to a screeching halt this past September. It felt like everything that I thought I knew about teaching was useless and all my past success suddenly did not make one bit of a difference. What had changed? I moved from teaching high school and junior high to elementary school. I had no idea what I was getting into.

The move to elementary accompanied my family's move from Ra'anana to Harish. My husband and I wanted to move to a place where we could afford a large and modern apartment. We wanted to live in a place with lots of kids and green space. We found what seemed to be a haven for children and young families. I reveled in the excitement of starting over in a brand-new place. I had heard about how open the people in Harish are to making new friends and building a community.

When we arrived, I was shocked to find very little except for dust from construction and devastating heat from lack of trees, which made me feel like I was standing in the middle of a frying pan each time I went outdoors.

In spite of a heavy two weeks at home with my children in the cruel heat of August, I happily ventured to my new school on September first with my eldest daughter who was starting grade one. It was important to me that she would feel my presence at school, even though we would spend our days in separate buildings. My daughter's two years in special education helped her prepare for first grade and her aide would surely support her but, I felt that she needed more, and I had the ability to give that to her. I had given up a job offer at an amazing junior high school that was a good match for me so that I could give my daughter the boost of confidence that she needed. I felt good about everything; that is, until I entered my first class.

They didn't know I was there. They didn't see me. They didn't hear me. They didn't care. I couldn't believe what was happening! I tried not to yell and inside I tried not to cry but I was so disappointed. I had taught grade seven for so many years and had had lots of success. "Why was grade six so different? I said to myself. It didn't take me long to understand the dynamic of this grade and I was sure that I would eventually win their hearts. What did I know?

Next were grade four boys. Yes, just boys, twenty-eight 9 year old boys. For forty minutes, it was more of the same. They didn't see me. They didn't hear me. They didn't care. I felt like I was in some kind of bad Disney movie. They were smacking each other, screaming at each other, throwing things at each other jumping on one another's backs and doing airborne karate kicks. I shook as I sat down at the teacher's desk, trying to make sense of the situation. I wondered if they were suddenly going to attack me. I panicked inside. I did not know what to do. That night I went home, and I cried all night long.

I actually cried, almost every day for six months. I could not sleep at night and my health started to deteriorate. I would stay up all night thinking of how to change this situation. I tried everything; I brought in volunteers so I could split the students into small groups to try to bridge the gaps and keep the students focused. I read books, I talked to professionals, and I talked to colleagues who shared the same struggle. I was very open with my principal about what was happening, and I also leaned heavily on my teaching partner from the teachers' college where I had just started lecturing at that November. I felt like a fraud. Who was I to lecture about teaching when I could not even handle these students on my own?

Little by little, the boys of fourth grade got to know me better. I often sat and observed them during other subjects to see if the situation was any better. The administration had made the drastic decision to change their homeroom teacher in hopes that someone else could hold them with a tighter grip. Luckily, this was a positive change for them. I felt that I was able to make some headway. I still struggled with the sixth grade. Fortunately, I had two other lovely classes that reciprocated the love and effort that I imparted to them, which gave me the strength to keep trying.

By the time late February came around, I started to actually enjoy my time at school. My principal even commented on my smile and the skip in my step. Unfortunately, that smile disappeared as that familiar feeling of chaos, that I had gotten used to, returned. However, this time it was not the students that stopped me in my tracks.

I do not think that there is a teacher out there who was not thrown for a loop when Corona stuck. I am sure that many of the more technologically inclined teachers enjoyed the opportunity to share their expertise and teach in a way that they enjoy the most. For most of us, however, the switch from the classroom to Zoom was like having a bucket of ice water poured over our heads. We were shocked and awakened into a new reality. I am proud to say that once the Passover holiday passed, many teachers were able to figure out a workable system. Zoom was great because the students who usually made teaching so difficult could literally be muted. THAT WAS AWESOME! I enjoyed engaging the students through different games and lessons that I discovered out of necessity, which I use now out of desire. As progress flourished with my pupils at school, new problems arose at my college.

Isolation meant that student teachers could no longer practice at their host schools. The highlight of their first year, which they had been waiting for an entire semester, was taken from them in the blink of an eye. Zoom with classes at their host schools was possible but felt superficial considering they barely knew the pupils. Moreover, trying to maneuver classes of learners that they did not know, while their host teachers were learning to cope with the situation, didn't seem fair to anyone.

It occurred to me that bringing my pupils from my elementary school and my students from the college together in small groups was a win/win situation. I could be their lecturer and host teacher concurrently. I would be able to tell them exactly what they needed to know about the pupils they were teaching and personally help them learn to teach the material. Best of all, I could watch over all of this during their recorded sessions. Working with my students and pupils together was like putting together pieces of the most beautiful puzzle day after day. I watched my students succeed during their sessions in places that I could not because of the behavior problems in the class. This opportunity had a positive influence on the self-esteem of both the pupils and the student teachers.

Once school was back in session, the pupils sat straighter in the seats and looked at me differently. They understood that there are people in the world who truly care about their success. They were not able to really see this until the world stopped turning. Everything had to stand still and learning as they knew it had to change completely in order for them to allow themselves to be loved and cared for. You see, Harish is a new city. Tradition, culture and history don't exist here like they do in well-established cities such as Ra'anana, Jerusalem or Petach Tikvah. Everything is new and new can be scary. If it was scary for me in the beginning, hence all the sleepless nights, I can only imagine how the kids and their parents felt when they moved here. I suppose that is why things were so hard in the beginning. We were all in survival mode.

Little by little, the municipality planted trees. I love Harish more and more and I am so happy that I can take part in caring for the children of my community while I take care of my own children. The dust has settled and Harish has grown into an impressive town over this past year. I have fallen in love with the people and the positive energy here. I have heard from so many others how they struggled here in the beginning. This is the cost of building something new and great; these are simply growing pains.

My college students are still working with my pupils through the summer and will continue with them next year, while collecting volunteer hours from the college. These young people did not want to let each other go and we found a way for them to stay together. Through the experience of setting up students and pupils, I discovered that not all families have a computer at home. I turned to 'Angels on Wheels' (Peled, 2020), an organization that helps everyone from lone soldiers to families in need. They donated computers and my neighbor who is a computer technician made sure that they were all in working order. I wrapped the computers up like a gift and wrote a note of encouragement, which I stuck on each monitor. Another way to show the students that they matter and that their community cares.

I wrote this piece with new teachers in mind because this year was a new beginning for me in many ways. Remember that with big change comes big adjustment. The first years of teaching are the most difficult and every now and again, you will be hit with a challenge that seems bigger than you. I was able to get through this because I had people to lean on.

One of the best pieces of advice that I give my student teachers is not to go at this alone. It is so important to find friends among your staff who can help support you during difficult times and celebrate victories during good times. I felt like I wanted to give up during the first few months of school. I am so glad that I did not because I get smiles and elbows wherever I go. Those smiles are worth more than diamonds. Teaching, as I said before is not an easy profession but do not throw in the towel when things get hard. Think about what you do to change the situation, lean and glean from others and remember that you have the power to change lives. By the way, I never did figure out those sixth graders but I am okay with that!

References:

Shay Peled. (n.d.). Retrieved August 23, 2020, from <https://www.facebook.com/peledshay/posts/3275454662477205>

Kinneret Ozeri made Aliyah (immigrated to Israel) from Canada 14 years ago. She is married and has three energetic little girls. Kinneret is head of the English Department at Telmei Hadar Elementary School in Harish and a pedagogical advisor at Seminar Hakibbutzim in Tel Aviv.

LITERATURE DURING LOCKDOWN CREATING A CREATIVE (WRITING) CORONA CLASS

by Emmy Leah Zitter (ejzitter@yahoo.com)

Henry James. Virginia Woolf. Franz Kafka. C.S. Lewis. Sylvia Plath

What do these renowned authors have in common with a small group of first year students studying Creative Writing in the English Department of Michlalah* – Jerusalem a teacher-training college?

They all kept journals. Journals that made them more effective writers. Journals that made them closer observers of the world around them. Journals that helped them better understand themselves.

And for the Michlalah-Jerusalem students, journals that would help them through the tough early days of the peculiar world that emerged in the spring semester of 2020: the world of Corona.

Before Covid-19

First semester we followed a conventional Creative Writing syllabus. Haiku, sonnets, dramatic monologues, memory poems. The students learned to appreciate the richness of the English language and understand challenges and possibilities inherent in writing in accepted poetic genres.

Second semester – moving on to short stories. We would stretch our imaginations by writing fiction, practicing standard techniques of short story writing: composing dialogue, creating setting, establishing character.

Covid-19

But suddenly, without warning, our own dialogues included unfamiliar words like ‘lockdown’ and ‘social distancing’; our settings shrunk to 100 meters around our homes and a virtual box on a Zoom screen. The most important character in our lives became an invisible, insidious virus. Reality had become stranger than any fictional story we could devise. And a changed reality demanded a changed Creative Writing course.

The first change was unavoidable, as we moved in one week from face-to-face classes to Zoom and Moodle learning. But as many teachers discovered, simply switching lectures and assignments to online platforms does not work well. Without losing sight of course objectives, teachers had to modify their syllabi to make them effective in the new medium and, in our case, to reflect and take advantage of the new reality.

Which brings us to change number two: genre. Creative nonfiction is a genre encompassing many genres: journalism, history, science and technology, cooking, memoir, etc. Lee Gutkind (2020), editor of an online journal called Creative Nonfiction, defines the genre simply but succinctly: “true stories, well told.” Well, in the intense and dramatic world of Corona, suddenly everyone had her own story. Instead of escaping into a fictional world, our students would use techniques of fiction to tell those stories in personal essays. ‘Real-life Corona’ stories, well told.

The new genre and the new medium brought us to syllabus change number three: the blog. Like many famous authors who kept journals, though with a twenty-first century online twist, our students would record their thoughts, impressions, feelings, ideas, and use them as material for their personal essays.

Below are some of the blog entries and selections from the personal essays they helped inspire. Reading them we get a blow-by-blow record of the developing story of the Corona pandemic as it unfolded. We read fear and we read faith. We get new insights into family, friends, and even food.

In these entries you will join in a Corona street synagogue, prepare for the Passover Holiday wearing masks and gloves, keep a young woman company at her first on-her-own Passover Seder*. You will see talented young women coping and hoping,

Opening entry from the class blog, Dr. Emmy Leah Zitter, March 30th.

If life gives you lemons, make lemonade...nice thought, if cliched. But I couldn’t help thinking it as I stood on my

small balcony, sheltered behind the budding lemon tree in my garden. The tree had taken on a new job: *mechitzah** for my tiny ezrat nashim*, a one-woman women's gallery in a makeshift synagogue, our outdoor "Corona minyan*," spread over our cul-de-sac.

The tree was full of sweet-scented blossoms. That Shabbat*, we blessed the upcoming Jewish new month of Nisan, when we would say the blessing on blossoming fruit trees. Was Nature mocking me – and all humanity – blooming in its beauty while we lived in fear and isolation? Or could I find comfort and consolation in the beauty of G-d's world? Lemonade, for sure...

Rena Perl, personal essay. Originally from L.A., Rena recently made *Aliya on her own.**

As I sat in the cramped, dimly lit room in an office building in Givat Shaul, my Hebrew teacher asked our thoughts about the Corona virus picking up traction in the news. Nonchalantly, I responded with, "More people die of the flu every year, this is nothing to worry about."

Oh, how wrong I was...

Annael Chetrit, April 5th. Another recent immigrant, Annael is mother of a little girl.

The air is bustling with energy. Blossoming trees announce the arrival of spring, the sun's rays feel warm on our cheeks, and the air itself feels full of excitement. But this year, something is different. Something is interfering with the frequencies of the buzzing atmosphere.

Loud news reports blaze through the buildings. Far away, distant sirens sound incessantly. Our faces reflect fear with every breath.

We try to focus on the long list of tasks we have ahead We clean, we buy, we prepare, we try to forget the world outside.

What are we celebrating exactly?

A holiday.

One of the most elaborate and time-consuming Jewish holidays of the year.

A holiday where G-d liberated us from a place of horrors. And now we stand here praying for G-d to do the same again.

Maybe it's time for another Exodus

Shoshy Cohen, April 5th. A Native Israeli Hebrew speaker. Shoshy loves to write in both languages.

8:15 AM

Is it day? Night? What's the date today? I dunno. Another day of boredom? Forget it; I'm back to sleep. I pull my blanket over my head. Ah! Sweet fluffy clouds embrace me, and I sink into their cozy wings.

10:17 AM

What? Already past my wake-up time? I suppose my alarm clock is on no-pay leave too. I stretch myself out of bed, shuffling to the kitchen. Oops! Out of milk. "Can someone please go over to the grocery to get me some milk? Hello, anyone home?" Seems like I'm the only person awake. (Later, at lunchtime, I discover that they'd already finished breakfast and began *Pesach** cleaning while I was still lolling in la la land ...).

10:47 AM

Well, let's see what I have to do. Hmm ... dust the china closet, clean the windows in the living room ... OK, not bad, especially when that's the only entertainment available during this "house arrest". Gloves, a mask ... who took my mask? You guys are being irresponsible. No worry; I'll get a new one. I find the first mask a few hours later. drenched with bleach. Kills viruses and *chometz* at the same time.

Rena Perl

My solo Corona *Seder* wasn't full of fear and miracles, but it was unique – and wholly unexpected. But isn't a main theme of the *Pesach Seder* – whether celebrated by myself in my dorm room, at home with loved ones, or like my grandfather a lifetime ago in a dark Shoah* -era forest, isn't a main theme that G-d is there, that all is in His control? If our human expectations don't play out, we should not mourn, just take it as a chance to redirect and thrive.

Aviva Safir, April 12th. Aviva is the mother of two lively, happy kids, living in the center of Jerusalem.

The sun shining and dimming used to rule over me. The rain would keep me in and the sun would beckon me out. But now weather doesn't matter anymore.

It used to be that Jaffa Road, where I live, could bring me to the mournful past and hopeful future. But the road is now just 100 meters long and freedom stays within.

I used to rush out the door, and call “I’ll be back soon!” But now I stop to uniform myself. Every pocket is occupied with liquid killing germ gel, a mask to protect me from the air, and gloves to separate me from a lingering silent death. Freedom used to be living without a care. Freedom now is choosing to live because I care.

Gabriella Stamelman, April 27th. The class “Corona Kallah*” raced off to her wedding in her native South Africa before Corona closed the skies. She’s back now, relishing life in Jerusalem.

The topic at my Shabbat table has shifted. We no longer discuss the Corona Virus, how scary it is and what the latest trends are (no more wearing of gloves apparently). We no longer discuss how long this whole situation will last and how we can’t wait for this to be over.

We now talk about our newest fears – that when all of this is really over, a vaccine has been invented and the curve has indeed been flattened, life will continue as usual.

Children will learn about Covid-19 in history lessons and the world will go back to its regular state. Schools will reopen, men and woman will go back to work and the hustle and bustle of normal life will resume. Parents will again be too busy for their children. Prayers will no longer be as personal, as lengthy, and family time, real quality family time, will once again be a thing of the past.

I understand that this pandemic is more than a lock-down. People are dying and we are all at risk. I understand the spread of this virus is dangerous. People are not working and unable to earn a living and businesses and the economy will take a while to recover.

But there is something unique about having time to sit and ponder. To reacquaint ourselves with our families and make time for hour-long conversations with friends and family we usually cannot manage during the hustle and bustle of normal life.

I’m excited to get back to real life, to go to the shops, meet and see people, eat out at restaurants. But what I have learnt from these past weeks is just how important it is to make time to connect with others, despite social distancing, and most importantly, to connect with myself. I have learnt just how important it is to take a breather. To stop and ponder. To think about my life, where I am going and who I want to be.

These weeks have taught me to break free from the self-imposed enslavement of my busy schedule, my constant ‘lack of time,’ to make time in the 24 hour day to breathe. To take in the scenes around me. To drink tea leisurely and to contemplate who I want to be and how I want to live each and every day.

Hadassah Shein, May 7th. Hadassah is celebrating the tenth anniversary of her Aliya.

I’m thinking about the contrast between Then and Now.

Then: I would squeeze onto the bus along with fifty others. If I was lucky, most passengers would get off before the long stretch of highway and I’d catch a seat.

Then: As soon as I’d walk into the store, I’d greet customers with a smile, offer a helping hand. Sit behind the register, ready to welcome customers into the store.

Now: I ride the bus with two other passengers and the driver. I get to work. I sit behind the register at the store, barricaded by strategically placed shoe boxes. I wait with bated breath, ready for any customer trying to sneak in without a mask.

Now, continued: One of the hardest parts of the job is the children. They come in without a mask, innocent, looking forward to getting their first pair of shoes. Instead of smiling, I find myself hesitating. Should I approach them and risk getting sick? The kids are cute, most of them toddlers just learning how to walk. They can’t wear masks, so I make sure the adults escorting them are.

Now, continued again: While I used to help the children by fitting their first pair of shoes and handing them a balloon, I now help by keeping my distance, wearing gloves and a mask. So when Now turns into Then, we’ll all be safe.

Rena Perl, May, 7th.

Today a fly managed to get into my room. At first, I barely noticed it, but its incessant buzzing began to interfere with my work, so I coaxed it out my window into the free world. However, the window has a screen in front of it, blocking the fly from easily going free. It was stuck in the space between window and screen, flying about, and trying to figure out how to free itself. Eventually, the fly discovered a small hole in the screen and squeezed itself to freedom.

Watching the fly's achievement, I realized it mirrored the times we are currently living in. We are so close to the outside world, but we're still mostly stuck in our homes. Lately, little by little, we've been able to escape through a number of small holes as schools and public businesses reopen. Hopefully, soon we will break through the entire screen and return to the fresh air of normalcy.

Tehilla Sebag May 10th. Tehilla made *Aliya* ten years ago from New Jersey.

This Mother's Day is different than others. The pandemic has shown me I cannot live without my mother. In these two months of quarantine I bonded with my mother like never before.

Looking back, I find myself wondering, did I remember to thank my mom enough for all the good she has done for me? For the times she was by my side, helping me celebrate my successes and accept my defeats? For the times she taught me the value of hard work, good judgment, courage, and honesty?

I hope I'll be able to thank her for everything she's done for me.

The laughter, smiles, and quiet times we've shared. If I forgot to express my gratitude for any of these things, I am thanking her now, during these difficult times, and hoping she has known all along how much she is appreciated and loved.

Annael Chetrit, personal essay, May 19th.

We often say in life "Appreciate something before it is gone," but I never really understood this until now. When walking outside or going to the grocery store is a luxury, you really gain a deeper understanding of this quote. I hope that in ten years I will look back and appreciate the smallest things in life. The trip to the makolet*, driving around in a car, going for a walk and all the simple pleasures of life we no longer take for granted.

And until then – I'll appreciate the delicious cheesy eggplant roll-ups I had time to cook for tonight's Corona supper.

Gabiella Stamelman, personal essay, May 31st.

While these last few weeks of lockdown and isolation have been the most bizarre experience of my life, and really quite difficult, had I the opportunity, I would not change a thing.

Postscript:

Twentieth-century author Jessamyn West once wrote "People who keep journals have life twice."

Would any of us choose to live over this strange year twice? Probably not. But since we were given no choice, the opportunity to write the experience and experience the writing through the class blog and personal essays helped our class through it and will remain a record of how we navigated through tempestuous times.

Or, to return to the opening metaphor of our blog...we've created a record of how we made lemonade from lemons.

Glossary

Aliya – the Hebrew term for immigrating to Israel

Chometz – leavened bread, an item traditionally not eaten or owned during the Passover holiday

Ezrat Nashim – the women's area in Orthodox synagogues

Kallah – the Hebrew word for bride and bride to be

Makolet – the Hebrew word for small neighborhood grocery stores

Mechitzah – partition between men and women sections in Orthodox synagogues

Michlalah – the Hebrew word for college

Minyan – a minimum number of men, 10 men needed for certain public prayers

Pesach – Passover, a Jewish holiday

Seder – the meal during the Passover holiday

Shabbat – the Jewish Sabbath

Shoah – the Hebrew word for the Holocaust

Reference:

Gutkind, L. (2020). What's the Story #72. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://www.creativenonfiction.org/>

Dr. Emmy Leah Zitter is English Department Head at Michlalah-Jerusalem and senior lecturer at Shaanan College's M.Ed program. Besides academic publications, she's authored young adult fiction and writes a regular personal essay column in *Mishpacha Magazine*.

You've reached the end of free preview.
The full print version of ETAI Forum is available to ETAI members only.