

Holding space with insomnia

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Volume 6

Issue 1

Spring 2023

Exegesis

Like so many in my community, and around the world, I experienced COVID-19 – as a community member, as a student, and as someone who contacted the virus. While navigating the illness was difficult, for me the aftermath, and the arrival of insomnia as a symptom of Long COVID-19 is where my story begins. I was a Master of Social Work student, integrating my learnings into practice to become a therapist. I had to learn how to show up authentically and with competence, while having not slept, sometimes for days. Walking this line so often invited the question: How can I show up fully, when I am so empty? Beyond being able to show up, how could I hold space for all my family's stories of COVID-19, while simultaneously having such a predominant story myself. Now, a year later, this poem is my journey of building an ongoing relationship with insomnia and my COVID-19 story so that I may hold my family's stories as a family therapist – and for both to be tended to with gentleness and love.

Citation Link

I wonder what you think of me
after all this time - the anger, the rage, the uncontrollable
transcend the physical form
of my body grief.

In the disbelief held in the lost cavern of
my soul - collecting dust and tears...
what might you say?

I have come to know you as insomnia - a word
given to me from those so far away and
unknown.

If you had a choice, is that what you'd want me to call you?
Is this the word that captures who you are and who we are
together?

An unlikely pair - the unchosen friend.
The veil of black that washes over me
weighing me down - calling me back to
the earth so tempting.

What would you want me to know?
Do I ignore your pleas in my rage and
cast you aside in the hopes you will cease to exist?
Or what if you could hear my cries?
Could you hold my loss and understand the vague
grasp of life I hold when you want to be my friend?

The wall you build around my brain dampening
the light trying to filter in.
In the dark - while you might hope for sleep - all I hear
are the faint echoes of those needing me.
Ones I cannot be there for.

Locked in a steel box, cut off from those I love - alone and hopeless.
Of those who can hear - it's only sleep
they say so absently seeing the crushing
echoes of sleepless nights.
The worry invited into every night.

This is my life.

Some say it's "anxiety", some say it's "long COVID"
all with an agenda.
And not my own. And certainly not yours.
We can name you and your origins in

a thousand ways, a thousand times.

Will you ever be satisfied?

Will you ever feel seen?

Will you ever

see

me?

We have different agendas - like parent and child holding strong
negotiating our co-existence.

The more I resist you, the louder you become - demanding
space, resisting my resistance to you.

Could we invite a new way?

How have we come to this place?

Knowing you is learning process

and uncovering the vast ways of what it means

to be alive - to be human.

So welcome, friend, join me in space

together let's be.

How will you know I hear you?

If I hold space for you, can we negotiate how this unfolds?

This new becoming, an unfolding, a chance
to settle in together.

In our resistance, we miss one another.

We build walls instead of bridges,

we hold strong instead of soft.

In gentleness, I surrender to us;

an openness, a release, to our

co-existence.

To our being with

together.

Author

Shelby Hopland Guidi is a white, queer, social worker, clinician, student, and artist living in Mohkinstsis (Calgary, AB). Intrigued by possibilities, Shelby draws upon social constructionist philosophies, and aligns with the principles of imagination, creativity, social justice, and curiosity. Drawing upon these as a foundation, Shelby invites possibilities for transformation, growth, collaboration, and play through the interweaving of language and the arts.

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Citation

Hopland Guidi, Shelby (2023). Holding space with insomnia. *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*, 6(1), 88-91. <https://doi.org/10.28963/6.1.11>