

CORONAVIRUS

This Is a Story About Social Distancing And Haiku Collage



By [Amanda Font](#) Apr 25, 2020

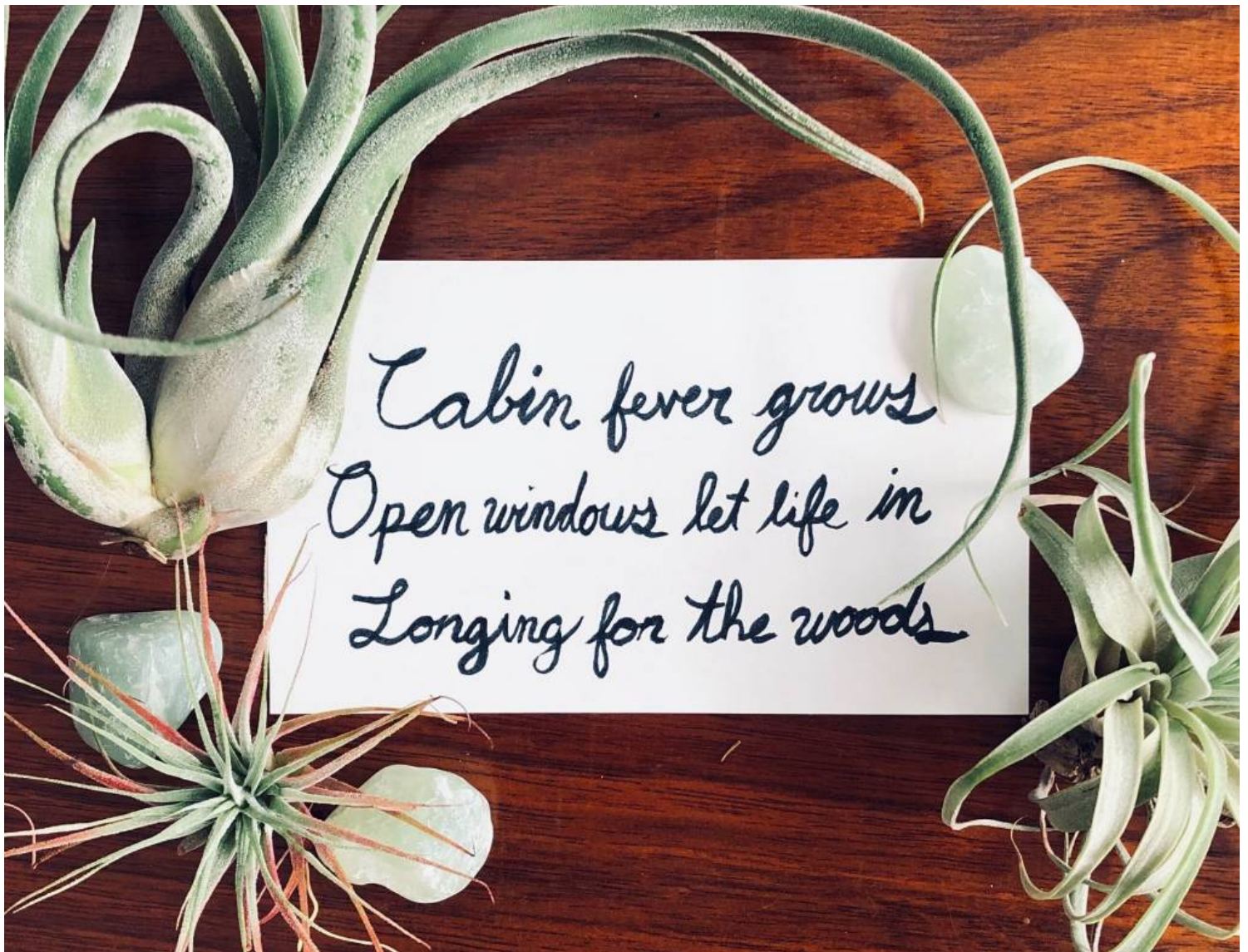
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A haiku inspired by sheltering in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Amanda Font/KQED)

How do you boil down the emotional complexity of the world to 17 syllables?

*The worry is more
Than the bravery some days
But we carry on*

*This apocalypse
All so surreal—including
No toilet paper*

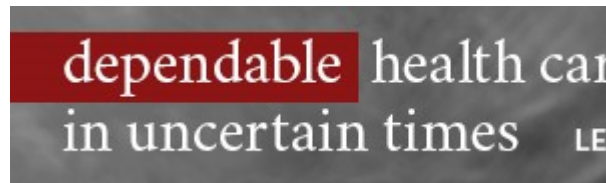
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Though his art spans different mediums, Nakagawa's primary focus is sound. Some of his other work includes acoustic recordings of architectural spaces, processed and sometimes overlaid with others. His 2018 project "[Peace Resonance: Hiroshima/Wendover](#)" is one example. Nakagawa made a three-point recording of the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome – a former exhibition hall destroyed by the U.S. atomic bomb attack on that city, left standing in its ruined state as part of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park – and played it back inside the hangar in Wendover, Utah, where the B-29 bomber Enola Gay took off in 1945, carrying the atomic bomb bound for Hiroshima.

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When the coronavirus pandemic hit, Nakagawa got a call from Cassandra Coblenz, director of public engagement at the [Orange County Museum of Art](#). They'd worked together before; Coblenz curated his first museum show at the OCMA. The museum, like so many others, was forced to close its doors during the COVID-19 pandemic – so they got creative with their programming.

Nakagawa recalls that Coblenz said she was tired of looking at a screen. "Let's create things that you don't have to look at," she said.

Nakagawa had an idea. Sitting in his studio, he thought, "I would like to do something that talks about this isolation that's sort of built into the pandemic." He decided to collect haiku and turn them into an audio collage. The short poetic form fit his idea, he says, because it's accessible.

*I miss you lover
An ocean is between us
Stuck here by disease*

"It's less about making art and more like a game to put down your thoughts," he said. "A haiku

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The museum put the call out to the public to submit short expressive reactions to sheltering in place. Nakagawa anticipated a moderate response. "Originally I thought I was going to make one piece with maybe 50 haiku," he said. "Maybe it'll be like 10 minutes long." But submissions came pouring in, some from around the world. Nakagawa received over 500 and used them to construct nine separate audio pieces. Playing under the recorded poems are processed field recordings Nakagawa made but had not used for previous work.

*Breathe the blossoming
Of the Earth unencumbered
By our existence*

The poems span the range of emotion, from high school seniors lamenting their missed graduations, to appreciations of the world greened by the spring and the sudden drop in human-caused pollution. Many address the paranoia inherent in trying to keep social distance, and the fear of death.

*This is my goodbye,
I wish I could be at school,
Even just once more*

*The husband coughs in
The other room — Don't panic
So much is in bloom*

"The majority are positive," Nakagawa said. "Gratitude, like the level of gratitude that people have, they're definitely expressing it in their haiku."

*Who are the heroes?
New perspective with new eyes
Now what matters most*

Listen to Nakagawa's audio project:

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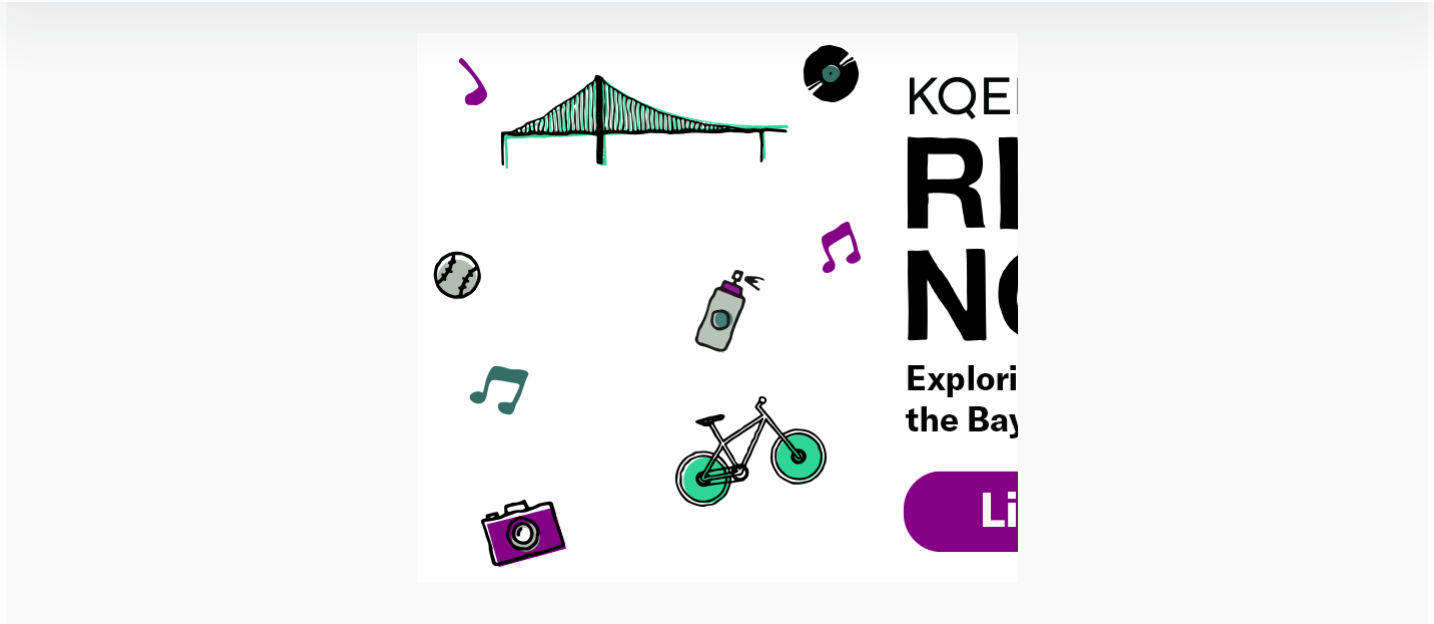
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