

The Pandemic in Six-Word Memoirs

“The world has never felt smaller.”

By Larry Smith

Mr. Smith is the creator of Six Word Memoirs.

Since 2006, I’ve been challenging people to describe their lives in six words, a form I call the six-word memoir — a personal twist on the legendary six-word story attributed to Ernest Hemingway: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

I’ve found that some of the most memorable six-word stories arise in the extremes — during our toughest and most joyous moments. So over the past several months, I’ve asked adults and children around the country to use the form to make sense of this moment in history: one person, one story, and six words at a time.

Not a criminal, but running masked.

— Stella Kleinman

Every day’s a bad hair day.

— Leigh Giza

Home ec: rationing butter, bourbon, sanity.

— Christine Triano

Can’t smell the campfire on Zoom.

— Melanie Abrams

Deserted crowded Manhattan, my own island ...
— Elisa Shevitz

Eighth hour of YouTube. Send Help!
— Leela Chandra

Messy hair, messy room, messy thoughts.
— Lily Herman

I regret saying, “I hate school.”
— Riana Heffron

Read every book in the house.
— Francesca Gomez-Novy

Never-ending, but boredom doesn’t faze me.
— Lily Gold

Required school supplies: screens, screens, screens.
— Darshana Chandra

Won scrabble; smile breaks through mask.
— Abby Ellin

Tuning out parents, under my headphones.
— Lukas Smith

This is what time looks like.
— Sylvia Sichel

Bad time for an open marriage.

— Rachel Lehmann-Haupt

Sun-kissed lips? Not kissed this year.

— Twanna Hines

Avoiding death, but certainly not living.

— Sydney Reimann

Social distancing myself from the fridge.

— Maria Leopoldo

Dream of: heat, limbs, crowds, concerts.

— Amy Turn Sharp

Teacher finding inspiration through uneasy times.

— April Goodman

Slowly turning into a technological potato.

— Jad Ammar

Cleaned Lysol container with Lysol wipe.

— Alex Wasser

Hallway hike, bathtub swim, Pandora concert.

— Susan Evind

Numbers rise, but sun does too.

— Paloma Lenz

Afraid of: snakes, heights, opening schools.

— Michelle Wolff

The world has never felt smaller.

— Maggie Smith

How do you make sense of this moment in history?

Share your own six-word memoir in the comments. We'll feature some of our favorites in a future article.

Larry Smith is the creator of the Six Word Memoirs.

Illustrations by Nicholas Konrad.

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Correction: Sept. 11, 2020

An earlier version of this essay misspelled the given name of a memoir writer. He is Jad Ammar, not Jade.

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