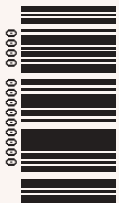


# love.

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Harvard Graduate School of Education

no. 3. | 13 April 2020





# Editor's Note

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## The Radical Power of Love |

Nearly four weeks ago the Harvard Coop put a sign on their door announcing they would be closing. I remember walking up to Harvard Square on their last day feeling like it was my final pilgrimage. I love books. I love literature. I love stories. I love how words can make you *feel*. I couldn't possibly contemplate lock-down without a stack of books to get me through.

I wish I could take you into the bookshop on that final Monday afternoon so you could experience those same magical moments alongside me. Classical music was playing softly in the background, and every customer had at least 7 books balanced in their arms. We were gently taking our time to choose which delicious prose we were going to delight in during

isolation. We carefully swapped novels from the our arms, to the shelves, and back again as we realised that our budget was more modest than our imaginations. We were, against every instinct, going to have to limit our literary consumption. The bookseller packaged up my purchases with so much love and kindness, as if she too realised how precious they were in these times. Indeed, the pages I was buying had taken on a new level of significance that required extra tenderness; the characters wrapped tightly in brown paper were to become my primary source of company.

That day, I took home three of the books about love: bell hooks, *all about love*; André Aciman, *Call me by your name*; and Daniel Jones, *Modern Love* (I would recommend them all!). They became personal antidote to this madness.

I love love. I love the immense vulnerability that it requires. I love how love can fry your brain and leave you breathless. I love how love shows up in fierce friendships. I love how love is so madly intertwined with fear and pain and healing. I love how love liberates. I love how love can be simultaneously so easy and so impossibly hard. I love how good love stories are able to hold the complexity and simplicity of the most powerful emotion on planet Earth.

I think a lot about how I will lead my future school with radical love. One day when I've opened, I will invite you to take a look, and my greatest hope is that it is the most loving school community you have ever walked into. My students will know what love looks like and feels like. They will know how to act lovingly with the vulnerability and bravery that love requires. They will champion love for themselves and our world because they will know just how powerful and important their love is. I can't wait for you to come and see!

In the mean time, these wildly absurd times call for widely absurd acts of love. I hope you are finding space and ways to love more wildly than ever before.

The stories shared by contributors this week are beautifully loving, courageous, vulnerable and honest. Enjoy!

*With love, Flic.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### HOME

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<b>Editor's Note</b>	02
<b>May You Rise</b> Tim McCarthy	05
<b>No Barriers</b> Christelle Saintis	18
<b>Love looks not with the eyes</b> John-Henry Wapham	19



<b>Love</b> Coco Rosenburg	21
<b>Love</b> Jayanti Bhatia	20
<b>Truly My First Love</b> Huajun Wu	24
<b>A Quote</b> Annie Nam	27
<b>Unreliable Love</b> Sarvazad Saba Katouzian	29
<b>Love in the time of corona</b> Keya Lamba	32
<b>Have you ever felt this love?</b> Jazmín Chi	35

If you want to react to any of the pieces  
featured, please email:

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Letters will be added to next weeks edition.



# "May you rise to it"

## A love letter to students in an unprecedented time

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written by Tim McCarthy |

My dear students,

Let me say this first: I love you – and I hope all of you are somewhere safe right now.

I know this doesn't find any of us well. This global pandemic has profoundly upended our lives and livelihoods and routines and responsibilities, to say nothing of our capacity to work and dream together to build a better world. The corona crisis has catapulted us into complete chaos, accompanied by a disorienting mix of emotions: fear and despair, anxiety and anger, uncertainty and longing, concern

and compassion. If you are like me, you're experiencing all these things at once on any given day. As one friend put it: "I didn't realize I could have so many mood swings before my first cup of coffee." As a historian, I rarely use the word unprecedented – after all, almost everything has some kind of precedent – but I dusted it off last week and have been using it more and more with each passing day. History will have time to take full account of this moment, but first we must survive it.

And I want to believe we will.

Over the last two weeks, I've been in touch with many of you, and I know you're not okay: I know you're freaking out; I know you're feeling sick; I know you're sad and disappointed and angry and anxious; I know you can't afford to go home; I know you don't feel safe at home; I know you don't have a home or know where home is right now; I know your work life is precarious; I know you worry about being able to pay bills; I know you're worried about money and financial aid and student loans and debt; I know you don't know if you can go to school next year;

“ ...and I know you are searching for some kind of hope. I am, too.

I know you're worried about visas; I know they're closing borders and banning travel; I know you're worried you won't be able to come back; I know you want to stay here; I know you don't want to stay here; I know you don't have documentation; I know you're worried about being targeted; I know you have pre-existing conditions; I know you're more susceptible to this virus; I know you don't have reliable health care; I know you're on the front lines of this; I know you're worried about your families, both given and chosen; I know you have to work and home school your kids; I know you can't afford child care; I know you have to take care of your parents; I know your summer plans are cancelled; I know your first years and final years have been

ruined; I know you don't know what your acceptances mean right now; I know you don't want to take classes online; I know you don't have reliable internet access; I know you don't want to continue taking classes at all; I know you worry about grades; I know you want to know why anyone is still giving grades; I know you're mourning the loss of sports seasons and artistic productions, proms and parties, graduations and commencements; I know you don't know what to do; I know none of this makes any sense; I know you feel like too many of our leaders are failing; I know you wish you had some warning; I know you still want to mobilize and organize and protest; I know you want to work on a campaign; I know you are worried about the election; I know you want to burn it down; I know you want to build something up; I know you want to be useful; I know you want to know when it will all be over; I know how many of you feel alone right now; and I know you are searching for some kind of hope. I am, too.

For what it's worth — and I also know this isn't nearly enough right now: I hear you.

To be honest, I know many more things about you than I ever knew a few weeks ago. I'm overwhelmed by it, too, but let me just say this: I'm here for you, whatever that means moving forward, because once you're my student, you're always my student. We're all making this up as we go along right now — no one should pretend otherwise — including your teachers and administrators, who are trying their best, along with everyone else, to figure this madness out in real time, moment by moment. For the time being, let's try to

trust each other more than we have before, rely on each other as best we can, and ask each other for help however and whenever we need it. This is not the best time to work out pre-existing acrimonies and resentments and suspicions, as longstanding or legitimate as they may be. We have an opportunity, right now, to try to be the best version of ourselves. Never has a tired cliché been closer to the truth: we're in this together.

Most of you probably don't know how much I love to write letters. Back in the day, I wrote letters all the time. In middle school and high school, I often got in trouble for passing letters — and also talking too much — in class. (This is the real “origin story” of my communications “expertise”!) Both my grandmothers were legendary letter writers. My paternal grandmother — the Irish side — was a trailblazing educator, the oldest of sixteen immigrant children and first in our family to go to college, who wrote epic letters to her many siblings, students, and friends.

“ ...I wrote letters all the time.... I often got in trouble for passing letters

She kept all their responses in shoeboxes in her dusty attic — an archive, of sorts, of their lives. (This was, in fact, the very first archive I ever discovered, after she passed away from cancer the spring of

my freshman year of high school.) My maternal grandmother — the Italian side — was a tireless factory worker, a “cuffer” on the garment assembly line who earned her GED when I was a teenager, who wrote to me regularly when I was in college and graduate school. She always apologized for her handwriting and misspellings, but now I'm ashamed to say that I always spent the few dollars she tucked into each of those envelopes without keeping her letters or writing her back. (That archive, alas, is lost.)

“ ...as a rebellion against our unrelentingly digital world

My resolution this new year was to write several letters each day, in part, as an overdue tribute to my late, beloved grandmothers, but also as a rebellion against our unrelentingly digital world. I promised myself I would hand-write regular affirmations — sincere expressions of gratitude — to the many people in my life who have made and sustained me over the years. I bought nice cards and cute stationary and fun stamps, and I wrote dozens of letters to friends and family in January and February, before life got too busy again. One rarely has the chance — or inclination — to renew one's abandoned resolve, but as my mother likes to say: “The Lord works in mysterious ways.”

Here we are.

“ ...and I know you  
are searching for  
some kind of hope.  
I am, too.



My favorite type of letter is a love letter, the most recent of which is here, to my 10-year old niece Malia. She has not yet read it, but she will someday, when the time is right.

“ ...love letters — both private and public — can sustain us, even save us.

My forthcoming book, *Stonewall's Children*, is also a love letter of sorts — to the past, present, and future of queer folks. Only a few people have read the entire manuscript so far, but everyone will have the chance to do so when it's published next year. By definition, love letters are usually private affairs, and most of them don't see the light of day, if they ever do, until long after they're written. (I wonder how many love letters have died in dusty attics — or draft folders?) I suspect people are afraid to write them because they're afraid to be vulnerable, exposed or “outed” in some way, which is perfectly understandable yet profoundly tragic. Fear always is. But then, without warning, an unprecedented fear hits us all in real time, and we realize we cannot wait for the ideal time.

To be honest, I wish everyone would write a love letter to someone right now. More than ever, I believe love letters — both private and public — can sustain us, even save us, at a time when fear threatens to undo us.

If you couldn't already tell, this is my love letter to all of you.

Because I'm your teacher, I want to respond to — repay, reciprocate — the things you have shared with me and taught me in the past few weeks. In her recent book, *Can We Solve the Migration Crisis?*, my dear friend and colleague Jacqueline Bhabha, citing the two characters that constitute a single word, reminds us that “crisis,” in Chinese, is both danger and opportunity. We are rightly preoccupied right now with the dangers associated with this crisis, which are serious and many. But let me focus instead on the opportunities it affords us to build community, find compassion, and stay critical. In the absence of a vaccine or cure, which we know will be slow in coming, these are the best antidotes we have to get us through this current crisis.

“ ...this is my love letter to all of you.

As you know, I have always believed that the classroom can and should be a community. Throughout my teaching career over the last 25 years, I have tried to cultivate and curate this as best I can, and we've built community together over and over again. We have done so by getting to know each other, giving each other equal air time, listening as much as we talk, devoting ourselves to the work, and respecting each other's different

perspectives and opinions, even and especially when we don't understand or agree with them. We haven't always done this perfectly — I'll be the first to admit my own mistakes and missteps along the way — but we've worked hard at this for a very long time now. This has been one of the great blessings of my life, and it has taught me many invaluable lessons that I am leaning hard on to get me through this. Classroom community is obviously easier to foster when we're face-to-face, in the same space over a sustained period of time. This is the magic that makes education worth its frustrations and imperfections, even in the best of circumstances. In this time, which is hardly that, when we are confined to virtual spaces for the foreseeable future, building community is a powerful and profound challenge.

For what it's worth, my colleagues, myself included, are doing our best to adapt to these difficult times and damn technologies, as are you, with little warning on an unforgiving timeline. For what it's worth, never in my life have I seen more educators — at every level, in every place I teach and well beyond them — reaching out to one another for ideas and support.

“ ... I never in my life have I seen more educators reaching out to one another

As students, you should know this. Please have patience with your teachers, and find ways to connect with us to keep this education going. Frankly, I see this as an unprecedented opportunity, a silver lining of sorts, for all of us to enlist each other in re-imagining teaching and learning on every level. As tempting as it may be for both students and teachers to give up on classes right now — to call it a semester and hope for a “do over” or “reset” next year — I think this is actually an ideal time, in less than ideal circumstances, to transform our classrooms into the communities we want and need and deserve.

“ ...enlist each other in re-imagining teaching & learning on every level.

Perhaps this is even a moment to flatten a different kind of curve: the ancient hierarchies and arbitrary evaluations, the unnecessary competitions and unhelpful conflicts, that so often get in the way of building the best and bravest classroom communities. In this time of “social distancing,” which also threatens to be a time of isolation and alienation for so many people, let's log on rather than check out. As I have witnessed time and again these past few weeks — through FaceTime check-ins with family, Zoom happy hours with friends, Google organizing calls with fellow activists, GoTo webinars and Facebook Live events with strangers and kindred souls, and all sorts

of sessions on all these platforms with many of you – these virtual spaces can produce real communities if we're willing to stay connected to each other and do this hard work together.

The strongest communities are rooted in *compassion*. Even before this virus hit, a common claim had caught hold: "this country has never been more polarized." As a historian of politics and social movements in the United States, I have been quick to counter this claim, asking people if they've ever read the fierce Constitutional debates of the late 18th century that gave birth to the nation, or if they've ever studied the ferocious debates over slavery in the 19th century that brought the nation to its brink, or if they've ever heard of, say, the 1930s or 1960s or 1980s or 2000s.


While historically accurate – we've definitely been polarized before, and there's ample precedent to prove this – my "push back" is also, on some level, I suppose, an act of intellectual and political arrogance. (It depends on the tone and the day.) But for what it's worth, though sometimes snarky, it is intended to trump (as it were) those who live foolishly in the present without regard for the past, or those who long feverishly for a past that never really existed. After all, navel gazing and nostalgia, when left to their own devices, are always dangerous. That said, there is no denying that we're living in an age where the pendulum of public discourse has been swinging aggressively back and forth between various poles of identity and ideology and inequality.

I have certainly taken my turn, whenever I had the opportunity, to push the pendulum hard in the direction I prefer. I don't apologize for this, since I've spent too much of my life playing Sisyphus. (You'll have to excuse me for mixing metaphors, it's a weird time.)

“ ... consistent attempts at deep understanding & acts of loving empathy

One response to these severe pendulum swings, so common in our schools these days, is the call for "civility," as if this should be the mandatory "middle ground," a requirement for our continued inclusion and belonging, rather than a serious moral aspiration that needs to be hard earned, especially by those who have not yet done their share of the pushing when it comes to things like equality, freedom, rights, and justice. (Or bending, if you prefer to quote Dr. King, as so many seem to do, on the "arc of the moral universe.")

That said, this unprecedented moment in history demands not superficial calls for "civility," which can sometimes feel like a weapon used to silence, but a more serious commitment to compassion. And by this, I mean more consistent attempts at deep understanding and acts of loving empathy that can lead us in the direction of sustained solidarity with people who are suffering – in this immediate instance, those who have been diagnosed with



“ ...enlist each other  
in re-imagining  
teaching & learning  
on every level.

COVID-19; those who have already died or lost loved ones; first responders and other essential workers who are on the frontlines of this crisis; anyone whose basic needs of food, water, work, wages, housing, and health care are not being met; those who are always more susceptible to disease and death during times like these precisely because they've never had their fair share of these things; and folks who have not yet endured this crisis but surely will.

“ ... we can ill afford to close the borders of understanding, empathy, and solidarity at the boundaries of identity, ideology, and inequality.

I have been thinking a lot recently about the AIDS crisis, which decimated the LGBTQ community during the 1980s and 1990s, when I was growing up, and has plagued the globe ever since. One of the reasons HIV/AIDS became a pandemic in the first place is because those who were most deeply affected – infected, “positive” – were stigmatized as social pariahs, disposable people. This is still the case with too many people in too many places. For the greater part of a decade during the so-called “Reagan era,” there

was a deadly lack of compassion (and political action) for “those people,” many of whom, it turns out, were my people.

Though dangerous, and devastating in its death toll, the AIDS crisis in its early stages also produced an opportunity for queer people to act up and demand everything from basic human recognition and rights to antiretroviral drugs and real political power. As Prior Walter declares at the end of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, a play that quite literally saved my life in those days: “This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away.”

During that time, as I have learned from my elders, our community was certainly not without conflict, even “incivility.” Nevertheless, we found a way to be compassionate with ourselves and care for one another at a time when no one else would. This is one reason why many of us, though not nearly all, were eventually able to survive that plague. It’s also why the LGBTQ community has something to teach the nation and the world right now about how to find compassion in the midst of crisis. When it comes to matters of life and death, we can ill afford to close the borders of understanding, empathy, and solidarity at the boundaries of identity, ideology, and inequality.

If ever there were a time to be compassionate bridge builders and boundary crossers, this is it.

As radically committed as we should be in this moment to building community and finding compassion, we must also stay critical. The corona crisis has inspired many exhortations to “not make this political.”

On some level, I suppose, I understand the intention behind this. The last thing we should do right now is search for any and every excuse to fight for its sake, and we should certainly resist any peer pressure to root for folks to fail. That said, the call to avoid politics in this moment is not only the wrong message, it’s a dangerous one. This is especially true for those of us who care about history and government, leadership and communications, social movements and human rights, race and class, gender and sexuality, public service and global development, or any of the other things we have studied together over the last generation.

“ ...be compassionate  
bridge builders and  
boundary crossers

Moments of crisis, whether “natural” or human-made, always place into sharp relief the pre-existing conditions of inequality and injustice in any given society. Whenever people experience widespread anxiety and suffering due to something like a pandemic, access to basic human needs — food and water, housing and medicine, work and pay — depends on where we are already

But the deeper truth is that this pandemic is a great un-equalizer.

“ ...this pandemic is a  
great un-equalizer.

Its most devastating ravages — at once physical, material, and emotional — will disproportionately impact those who are most vulnerable: those who are immunocompromised or incarcerated; those who are living in poverty or lacking in health care; those who are stateless or undocumented or housing insecure; those who routinely experience discrimination or isolation; those who are unemployed or working paycheck to paycheck. In the current case of the coronavirus, these things are abundantly clear. What’s also clear is that our most powerful institutions — governments and civil society organizations, hospitals and schools, militaries and marketplaces — are inadequately prepared and ill-equipped to deal with this most recent global health crisis.

This is no time to retreat from politics or trade in false equivalencies when it comes to our elected officials or political parties. Indeed, it is also no time to think that just because we are all in this together that we are in this together in the same way. Just as pre-existing health conditions

“ ...this is no time to  
retreat from politics

make some people more susceptible to illness, pre-existing social conditions (including health) make some people more vulnerable to everything – especially in times of crisis. And all of this is political.

“ ...Make no mistake, this is a generation-defining moment in world history

We are living through a global case study, in real time, where protagonists and antagonists, failures and successes, injustices and inequalities, power and privilege, best practices and worst practices are already revealing themselves. Make no mistake, this is a generation-defining moment in world history, unprecedented in real ways, and your generation will inherit whatever is to come. You will have to confront the big questions about the size and scope of governments, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the distribution of resources and capacity of markets, the morality of systems that sort and separate us, the sustainability of our way of life, the undeniable interconnectedness of us all, and so many other things that impact people and the planet we struggle to share.

The sooner you gain clarity and muster bravery in the face of all this the better. I want to believe we'll survive this moment because we still have so much more work to do.

For what it's worth, I promise to be with you in that work for as long as I am still here.

I have started and stalled and circled back to this letter for more than a week now. To be perfectly honest, I have never felt less useful in all my life than I do in this moment. But I am a teacher, so let me close with all I got: I love you and want you to be okay.

But During times of crisis, I always find my way home again to James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. I first encountered this book a generation ago, shortly after Baldwin himself went to his final home. I was around the age some of you are now. Over those many years, for a variety of reasons, it has become something of a sacred text for me.

“ ...It is the responsibility of free men to trust and to celebrate what is constant

I am certainly not alone in this. After re-reading it last week for what seems like the hundredth time, I want to share the passage that my husband CJ and I chose as a reading for our wedding almost nine years ago: “It is the responsibility of free men to trust and to celebrate what is constant – birth, struggle, and death are constant, and so is love, though we may not always think so – and to apprehend the nature of change, to be able and

and willing to change. I speak of change not on the surface, but in the depths — change in the sense of renewal. But renewal becomes impossible if one supposes things to be constant that are not — safety, for example, or money, or power. One clings then to chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope — the entire possibility — of freedom disappears.”

Four constants: birth, death, struggle, love. Birth we have, death will come, and the struggle, of course, continues. Love is ours to choose. And choose it we must — because you, dear students, are my hope for the deep change we need in this unprecedented time.

**May you rise to it.**

Love always,  
Tim

*Timothy Patrick McCarthy is Lecturer on History and Literature, Public Policy, and Education at Harvard University, where he is Core Faculty at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy.*

“ ...be compassionate  
bridge builders and  
boundary crossers





# Love recognizes no barriers

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written by Christelle Saintis | International Education Policy

When I think of love in the context of education (and I suppose in life too), this quote from Maya Angelou comes to mind:

*"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope."*

To me, this really encompasses why so many of us are in the profession - we recognize the power of love and hold nothing back. We see those who are falling behind and know that love is one way to pull them back up. We are not blind to barriers, but we attempt to break through them anyway. We know that the more love we give, the more love the students we are working so hard for will receive. And ultimately, isn't that what it's all about?



# Love looks not with the eyes

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written by John-Henry Whapham | School Leadership Program

“Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind.  
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.  
Nor hath Love’s mind of any judgment taste—  
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.  
And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.”

A Midsummer night’s dream is an exceptionally silly work but to this day remains one of William Shakespeare’s most popular works. In spite of the puerility, the above commentary on love is as profound as it is poetic. Love’s very beauty lies in its subjective experience and as such inspires the creative art world continuously.

In my own experience, I am married to the concept of love that Bill promotes. Love is an intense emotion, intangible yet visceral; an entity that could not be experienced by a single sense but rather the body as a whole. Cupid, painted blind, cannot experience love with just his eyes and Shakespeare wrote Sonnet 130 and 141 on the very theme of attraction being entirely separate of love.

The notion that love is reckless, hasty and in possession of famously poor judgement is something I have, rather unfortunately, experienced personally. Having had my betrothed do away with me in a somewhat abrupt fashion, I was naturally led down the path of questioning whether I had proposed too soon or shown poor judgement. Yet I find myself today with no regrets, nor with diminished feelings towards her. I was in love, a true and pure form of love, but our paths could not continue onward in the same direction. A victim of circumstance but not one ridden with anger.

If love is like a child, oft making poor choices, then I am growing in maturity with every choice. The lessons to be learned from such experiences are invaluable to us and the older we get, the more variety we see in love's broad spectrum. I have developed a fierce love for several of my Harvard peers and saying as much to them has liberated my heart from the constraints of societal guidelines of love. Love is not sultry glances across Gutman library, Love is not the two-backed beast, Love is not just a feeling. Love is your actions, your thoughts, your facial expressions, your mood, your motivation, your demotivation. This is love for me. Love for you could and possibly should be entirely different.

My life of love has been a messy, unpredictable, heart-wrenching, educational and developmental. I would not have it any other way.

“ ...messy,  
unpredictable,  
heart-wrenching,  
educational and  
developmental.

# Love

---

written by Coco Rosenberg | Arts in Education

you are the taste on my lips in the morning  
the salt of sweat and the sweetness of proximity  
even when you are far from me  
I feel your warmth on my skin  
the way falling feels  
day after day, I am falling  
into the newness of you  
into the knowing of you  
the way loving feels

if I can pull myself from inside the close space  
between your open lips and the crook of your back  
I will start to settle once again  
wrapping myself into you  
I have settled into the your familiarity  
the way trust feels  
like opening up the books I claim to have forgotten  
-really pushed aside  
opening myself up for you  
in the hopes  
that you will settle into me too

you are the smell on my skin in the morning  
the sweet musk of our entanglement  
your memory lingering on me through the heat of the day  
even when you are far from me  
I feel your warmth on my lips  
the way learning feels  
day after day, I am learning  
about our hopeful dichotomies  
about uncertainty as possibility  
and all the ways  
that one can fall  
the way loving feels

“

...By loving truly,  
totally and deeply,  
I realized that I can  
change anything



# Love

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written by Jayanti Bhatia | International Education Policy

To love and be loved is really an ecstasy,  
The feeling is as pure as the driven snow,

When respect and friendship come before love,  
It grows even stronger,

And, it doesn't have to be romantic,  
For it comes in many forms,

Love for parents, siblings, and family,  
Love for the family-like friends and neighbors,

Love for traveling through the oceans, mountains, and woods,  
Love for your favorite sports and mouth-watering food,

Love for arts and sciences,  
Love for the causes you lose sleep over,

I can go on and on and on,  
But no love is greater than the love for self...

Not the narcissist like love,  
But the self-caring and accepting like love,

Because you cannot truly love another,  
Until you know how to love yourself,

Yes, believe in yourself a little more,  
Love yourself a little more,

I bet, you will feel more loved, and  
The world will seem beautiful,

The world will seem beautiful...



# Truly My First Love

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written by Huajun Wu | Learning and Teaching

When did you fall in love for the first time?  
For me, I was 14.

My school organized a summer trip to Luding, a small county surrounded by towering snow mountains in the southwest of China. In my Chinese textbook, I had learned the heroic Battle of Luding Bridge during the Long March about nine decades ago, in which the Red Army of the Communist Party of China traveled 5600 miles in 360 days to evade the pursuit of the Kuomintang (KMT or Chinese Nationalist Party) army.

Earlier in history, during the mid-1840s, another major historical combat was fought here between revolutionary peasants and the rulers of the final imperial dynasty of China. The Dadu River zigzagging through Luding county witnessed the rebel troops of peasants shrinking from the original 100,000 to 2000. Perhaps the river was dyed red with blood when the surrendered farmers were all massacred and the screams of the Wing King, the leader of the farmers echoed in the valleys for years after he was dismembered, slowly.

To associate this place with romance is to see Einstein singing a rap or The Mona Lisa posing for a selfie and sharing her mischievous wink on Facebook. But that was the irresistible charm of love which does occasionally thrive in the least likely places, such as the two powerful feuding families of ancient Verona or even a cursed castle between a beauty and a beast.

“ ...traveling here is tougher than going up to the blue sky

In fact, it was the first time I had travelled out of my hometown, Chongqing, which has been nicknamed the “Mountain City”. The difficulty to travel in the region is best depicted in one poem of Li Bai. Born in the first year of 7th century, Li Bai became the Shakespeare in Chinese literary history, who wrote: “traveling here is tougher than going up to the blue sky.”

In the 1990s, traveling was much easier but life was still very slow. The bus ride to Chengdu was about 300 kilometers and took us about 10 hours (now it only takes one hour and a half by bullet train), so the girl and I spent a lot of time sitting together, chatting about our hobbies and listening to the songs from our favorite bands. We felt we had so much to share.

After arriving at Luding, we visited the Luding Bridge, which was basically made of nine iron chains and some wooden

planks. Beneath our feet, Dadu River was roaring like an injured beast. Waves crashed against the rocky and vertical cliff and rolled into a thousand drifts of snow. When we made our way together to the middle of the suspension bridge, as carefully as two acrobats on a tightrope, a sudden gust of wind shook the bridge.

That was the moment when she reached out for my hand, unconsciously of course. The minute I touched her delicate fingers, my heart was racing and my throat was tightening. There was an electrical shock going through my body. I could feel the sweat in one hand, the rough and cold iron chain vibrating in the other, the teacher’s awkward frown, and other boys’ dropped jaws as they watched in disbelief, and admiration.

Had I been seen holding a girl’s hand at school, I could have got myself a well-deserved detention or a three-hour lecture of how a decent young man should focus on his study instead of the opposite sex. People were rather conservative about school romance during my middle school days.



When a boy and a girl sat together on the same desk in the class, they would often draw a line in the middle and declare that they would never cross it until the end of their life. We called the line the 38th parallel, which was named after the Military Demarcation Line that separates North Korea and South Korea. See how serious the matter was?

“ ...true love is  
for the brave.

It was a reckless disregard for all the rules I had been taught and an invitation to capital punishment to hold a girl's hand right in front of all the peers and teachers. But 99% of my mind was obviously occupied with fantasy of romance and the notion of any risk has long been evaporated by the lightning of love that struck me dumb. I felt I could stare death in the face like the Red Army soldiers who had to crawl over the bare iron chains of the bridge under heavy Nationalist machine-gun fire from the opposite side before they seized Luding county in an epic battle on May 29th, 1935.

True love is for the brave. The only thing I cared about was the sparkle of tenderness and excitement in the hazel eyes of my girl. Looking at the river of no return, she didn't say a single word, but I seemed to have heard "I am the sand and you are the wind. Hold my hand and I'll go wherever you take me."

The next day, we reached the foot of Gongga Mountain and we would climb

to the top to see the glacier and the giant ice waterfall. There was only a deserted road and the only transport was horse. Riding a horse was not very difficult but it still took some getting used to. Then we discovered both of us loved horseback riding. We made our two horses run faster and faster and soon we left everyone behind. The two of us were alone with our horses in the depths of the forest surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

When the sun was high up in the sky, we found ourselves by the side of a peaceful lake, sitting next to each other under a shady tree, and letting the horse rest and drink some water while listening to the soft breeze passing through the summer leaves. She leaned her head on my shoulder, and I threw a pebble into the lake and we saw the ripples widening out. I sneaked a glance at her and noticed the redness that flooded her cheeks.

“ ...every cool breath  
we drew, each beat  
of our joyful hearts.

We were both quiet. Every cool breath we drew, each beat of our joyful hearts, the summer leaves and drifting white reed flowers, and the reflection of mountains that are soaking in the crystal clear lake seemed to be protected by the insular magic of silence. Right then and there, no sound could compete with what such a resounding silence could carry.

I knew I was in love.



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submitted by Annie | Technology, Innovation, Education

Dear Yong,

Here is a quote I really love.

"The minute I heard my first love story,  
I started looking for you, not knowing  
how blind that was.  
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere,  
they're in each other all along..." – Rumi

Happy birthday!

Love,  
Annie



“

Yet, the sea,  
where I first fell in  
love remains a  
distant memory



# Unreliable Love

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written by Sarvazad Saba Katouzian | International Education Policy

You're unreliable  
Your unreliable love  
You're unreliable, love

On Monday afternoon,  
These were some of the thoughts rushing through my busy mind,  
As my tears flowed down my face through my daily grind,  
I remembered when my friend Sarah once told me,  
"the cure for anything is salt water,"  
Sweat, tears, or the sea.  
Just this week and almost every week,  
the sweat and tears are flowing  
Yet, the sea, where I first fell in love remains a distant memory



## ...Dooset daram Mamanbozorg

The first time I truly fell in love,  
I remember I was by the ocean, walking on the sand, holding his hand,  
He was kind, ambitious, handsome, rich in his culture, and some would even point out in his pocket,  
But that to me meant nothing.  
I love someone for their values, their genuine care, and their desire to change the world for the better.  
However, my late grandmother thought he was the ideal gentleman.  
When we broke up, she kept asking "What happened to Khoshab?"  
The name of an Iranian juice brand, that rhymed with his actual name.  
This would always make me laugh, and say  
"You don't even know his real name, so why does it matter so much to you?"  
"Her Parkinson's controlled mind was playing games on her, so sometimes she would get the names wrong,  
As she deteriorated, she still always would ask me about my nonexistent love and dating life.

Well, my friends, it became very clear to me on July 6th 2019, when I last spoke to her,  
Her last words after I had returned from a month at Harvard were,  
"So have you found a boyfriend there yet?"  
Two weeks later when I returned home on a red eye, on July 18th, she passed away one and a half hours after I landed, rushing to the hospital to tell her one last time,  
"Dooset daram Mamanbozorg" that is, "I love you grandma" in Farsi

Mamanbozorg was a trailblazer, a career woman of her time, and a single mom for over forty years,  
You see, in my home culture, love is taboo, and divorce is shameful  
Mamanbozorg got a divorce when she was barely thirty, after about five years of marriage to my grandpa whom I never had the chance to meet,  
Love, sex and marriage are the secret institutions that we don't talk about.  
Instead of learning what intimate love really meant  
I grew up watching my parents bicker, worry and eventually separate  
In that time, I learned about Unconditional love that would mostly come from my Maman.  
More recently, seeing my Baba cry made me realize how hard it must be to lose a parent.

On July 18th, while I was standing at my grandma's grave site along with the rest of my extended family who all flew in last minute from LA or NY  
I felt loved, family love has always been what I crave, as an only child,  
In an instance, I felt broken when we were asked to place our hand on Mamanbozorg's coffin to recite our prayers,  
I regretted not having made her dreams come true, she had now left this world without seeing me get married  
At the same time, I felt conflicted because I remembered a day spent at the park with my maternal grandpa who made me make a promise at six,  
"You will go to graduate school, before you get married, unlike your mom. I love her lots, but that is one of the mistakes she made. She married your dad at a young age"  
They were 22 and 24,

At 22, I graduated from American University  
At 24, I ended the most serious relationship I've ever had  
At 26, I got into my dream school, Harvard,  
At 27, I decided to choose self-love, patience and hope for a new love.

I feel unreliable  
I see unreliable love  
We are unreliable, love

“ ...I decided to  
choose self-love,  
patience and hope  
for a new love.

# Love in the time of Corona

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submitted by Keya Lamba | International Education Policy



1. A couple who has been married for 60 years talks to each other.
2. A man thanks ER doctors and nurses for saving his wife's life.
3. Grandparents meet their newborn grandchild for the first time.



4. A doctor watches his son crawl for the first time.



“ ...messy,  
unpredictable,  
heart-wrenching,  
educational and  
developmental.





# Have you ever felt this love?

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written by Jazmin Chi | Technology, Innovation and Education

Writing about love should be easy for a person whose life motto is “spreading love and knowledge around the world” and who vehemently preaches love in all actions she performs, but in fact, it wasn’t easy at all.

There were many stories, countless vivid images running on my mind, several persons, words and gestures, numerous places and nature, innumerable, that I could not seize and encapsulate in few words, therefore I let them fly on my head, filling me with this wonderful feeling that enacts my inside showing it to the exterior in a hidden smile with a sigh while I close my eyes.

When I discovered my purpose, to “spread love and knowledge around the world” became. part of my DNA, my soul, and my inner self, and in the search to rebuild my life from the ashes it was, I came to realize that love, true, deep and real love, was the answer to all the problems any human can ever have, and I became obsessed with how to experience, spread and teach it.

My perception of love was totally distorted. Having grown with many imposed and conditioning behaviors in my family, society, religion and culture, I became a mirror of my surroundings, without realizing that I was only

perpetuating what I had been indoctrinated with. In a search that took years to shed the layers I was enforced with, person after person, situation after situation, struggle after struggle, laugh after laugh, I became a totally different human, my perception of love, totally changed and the amazing feeling I came to experience in my search for true love, made me see life from a totally different perspective.

Have you ever wanted to cry of joy, gratitude and love when seeing other people, nature or animals? I have to admit that this started to happen to me quite often since last year. I am the kind of person that can get lost for hours looking, feeling and being in nature or with animals, but I now know that also in the midst of people.

“ ...my perception of love, totally changed

I love to look the eyes, hands and feet. I can read lives, feelings, intentions, fears, patterns, pain and desires when I do so. Usually I remain observant and silent, but I can see beyond only words and actions at the moment people are with me. I know how to read the body, voice, vibrato, breath, gestures, glares, and even when people is lying or thinking differently of what they just said, I know it before they even say it, sometimes there is no need for me to see or hear, but I can feel it.

Living like this was not easy, I felt betrayed, neglected, used, and rejected the majority of the time, but I learned how to transmute those feelings into love and started to see life totally different. This changed my existence.

“ ...By loving truly, totally and deeply, I realized that I can change anything

I decided to see every single person that appears in my life, through the lenses of love, and when you vibrate in love, there is no single possible ounce of anger in your soul; instead, there is understanding and gratitude, which gives a totally different outcome in the reaction people get from us.

By loving truly, totally and deeply, I realized that I can change anything, even the most difficult, or impossible “problems” (and I put this word with quotations because instead of problems I like to call them, experiences or blessings in disguise) that rise in front of me.

Love, changed my life. Changed those imposed patterns I carried and gave me a clean perspective that made me love myself first and break those shackles I was living in from generations above. Love changed my family, after living in a violent environment, full of beatings,

shouts, anger, words full of hatred and many tears, my family is now united and more understanding towards each other. Love overcame the hate I had towards me, and made me understand how worthy and loved I am. Love changed the way I work, because I work with passion and love and not with fear or obligation, I work because I see a purpose in what I do, I aim to better the lives of the people I serve, instead of egotistically only look to fulfill my selfish desires. Love gave life to my daughter, by deciding to have her instead of killing her in an abortion, even though I knew how difficult it would be to cope with the society I grew up in under the circumstances she came to this world.

Love changed my relationships with people, because I became more understanding, less judgmental and more accepting. Love changed my romantic relationships, because instead of being jealous, demanding and reactive, I became a person who only gives gratitude and love, no matter how the other side treats me, because for me love is a conscious decision to be together, to build each other, to create something together.

“ ...love gave life to my daughter

Love is unilateral, it is not a contract where when you do A, I will do it as well, for me, I will love, no matter if the other person does not show it, because it is me expressing myself and not me waiting to react to the way others treat me. I do not care of how others

behave or treat me, it will not change the way I treat them. For me, every single human, animal and all nature, deserves my respect and love; therefore I will treat them from what is inside me.

“ ...true love does not own, true love does not force, true love does not beg

Is like a jasmine flower that shares its beautiful aroma, no matter how you crush, take apart the petals or even step on it, it will not stop sharing its aroma, no matter anything you do to it. Because true love is unconditional, but when we expect from others or attach to them, it stops to be unconditional. True love does not own, true love does not force, true love does not beg, true love does not impose, true love gives no matter if the other side cannot give anything back, true love does not demand, true love does not harm, true love understands that people react in ways and mechanisms that are imposed patterns, because they do not know better, understands that people sometimes are hurtful because they are shouting for help because they do not know how to deal with their feelings and emotions, understands that people sometimes are unconscious of the harm they do on others, because they are blinded and numbed by the pain they feel inside, true love has no need to forgive, because that feeling of entitlement of wanting an apology to forgive another person, vanishes in the sea of

understanding, and when you understand is impossible to judge and react, but otherwise if in your hands is to help, you help, if not, with dignity and gratitude, you turn and leave. True love accepts. True love is patient. True love is humble. True love looks for the wellbeing of others. True love dismantles ego, is a decision, a conscious one, and a habit that is developed in our minds and hearts.

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## Love vs. Death

My mother is the strongest person I have ever met in this world. I have seen her handling everything. From people coming without limbs that were severed by the train on the train tracks, urgently rushing to ER at the hospital, seeing her friends and colleagues mutilated, hanged, beheaded or murdered due to the drug war we live in the city we are... till calming me down in the middle of shootings taking place outside our home, because I get very, very perturbed and start shaking and crying so much.

My mother is the epitome of strength in my eyes. But, there she was, with her eyes tearing and her voice broken in front of my dad, who had been at the hospital since the 25th of February 2020, on the verge of death, with few days to live according to doctors. She knew it, he also knew it. She is a nurse and dad is a doctor. Both of them knew the magnitude of what they were dealing with. Both of them cried in front of each other, while I, looked from the other side of the bed.

- *Asegura mi vida Gordi.* (Secure my life Gordi. Gordi is the nickname my dad uses to call my mom.)

- *Sí Godito.* (Yes Godito. Godito is the nickname my mom uses to call my dad.)

They seemed to be absorbed in themselves, forgetting even my presence. That day, in front of me, my father was begging my mom to make everything possible for him to live and my mom, knowing the severity of the matter, was trying to say good bye to my dad. And I, I was there, with a convoluted mixed of emotions and feelings inside... but after almost two months at the hospital, love defeated death in my dad, because in the verge of his last breath, love made him come back to life again, and on the 11th of April 2020 he came back home with us.

“ ...love made him  
come back to life  
again

I now know that love and faith are the strongest forces in the world, and when we truly, deeply and totally succumb to them, by letting ourselves to be fully protected and used by them, we can change the world.

- And what is your superpower?  
- I know how to love.

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## Have you ever felt this love?

The love that embraces you, that burns you from the inside, it is born in your soul and manifested in the outside, the love that tells you what is the best to do, that makes you feel safe and secure, that touches you softly, and makes you cry of joy, the one that has shown you that you are valuable, worthy, the most important person in the whole world, the love that values your presence and cherish your heart, that looks to build you and rejoices in seeing how you grow, the one that feels proud of everything you have done, and loves the fact that your mistakes and past are also part of your soul and those made you to be who you are.

Have you ever felt that?

When your heart cannot cope with the world and is full of grief and despair, this love comes and lifts you up, making you smile so you can be the best version of your soul. When you have received so much hurt, from outside forces that you can't control, this love comes and shields you, defending your soul.

A love that knows what makes you smile.  
A love that studied your heart, so can become an expert on you.  
A love that understands that you are like a flower that has to be watered.  
A love that tells you, the areas where you can grow, but also helps you in finding a path in your soul...

A love that wants to spend every day with you because can't get enough of your soul.

A love that feels that you are an amazing person to share life with.

A love that shouts to the world who you are and feels proud of you, celebrates your achievements and helps you in the failures so they become areas to grow.

A love like this can be difficult to find, but if you do, please do not let it fly away from your heart.

A love that reads your mind, even when you don't know what to say, but because it knows your gestures and glares.

A love that also cares for the people that you love, and tries to build bonds with them to eventually also love them.

A love that surprises you with what your heart enjoys.

A love that cares for you and looks at you as a gift and a prize.

A love like this is not easy to find... but if you do please keep it close to your heart.

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Love indeed changed my life and that is why, until the last breath of my soul, I will keep spreading love and knowledge around the world.

