

**POSTCARDS FROM THE PANDEMIC: A PULASKI MEMOIR**

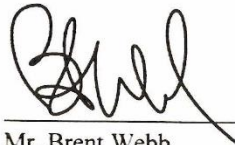
by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts | Department of Art

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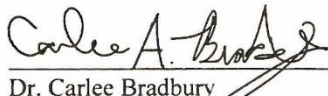
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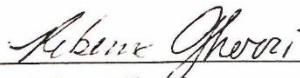
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## ABSTRACT

*Postcards from the Pandemic: A Pulaski Memoir* is a photographic and written narrative depicting the COVID-19 pandemic from the viewpoint of an anonymous person residing in the southwest Virginia region of Appalachia. The images are intimate, and the words are personal, inviting the viewer to become an active participant in the story.

This series traces its creative inspiration and influences to several origins. King examines the artistic philosophies of Nick Bantock, author and artist of the book trilogy, *Griffin and Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence*. Through postcard or letter-sized illustrations and correspondence text between two fictitious artists, he tells a love story. Although King's work involves photography-based postcards and one-sided communiques, Bantock's storytelling solution inspired the idea of mail as storytelling method in *Postcards from the Pandemic*.

For a historical perspective, King looked at work created by three photographers during the 1918 Pandemic—Edward Steichen, Lewis Hine, and Alfred Stieglitz. King chose these imagemakers for their involvement in the Pictorialism movement, which is a paramount influence in King's photography.

Discovering they all used the 1918 Pandemic to pursue their passions in ways that veered from Pictorialism, King looks back at the movement and its essence. She explores the artistic sensibilities of Pictorialism, wherein early photographers manipulated images during the developing phase to heighten a quality of atmosphere and emotion. They did this through increasing shadows and light, exposure time, and affecting selective focus. Although this may have abstracted the actual subject, they believed it provided more insight into the moods

surrounding time and place. This idea still resonated with King, and she decided to pursue this style in her work.

But process is also a dominant force in King's physical output and is as much an inspiration as are other artists. Once she had decided to create a postcard narrative, she researched postcards from the 1918 Pandemic. Photography-based cards were created using photo-mechanical processes, akin to the photogravure process favored by Pictorialists.

With her usage of text in the form of a postcard correspondence, King added another layer to her series, the Stamp Project. She invited other artists to participate by creating stamp artwork to help tell the story of the pandemic through their mini-creations.

In the second chapter, King describes her rationale for the series and the process choices she made when choosing mediums. She also discusses her method of using social content curation, a survey-based procedure, to help select the 24 black and white photopolymer gravures included in the series. And she defines the parameters she used for the Stamp Project.

Chapter three describes King's process for the four elements involved in *Postcards from the Pandemic*. She describes starting with digital photography and goes into further detail about photopolymer gravures. She follows this with how she created the postcard-like text panels that accompany each image and how she miniaturized art into stamps and adhered them to the text panels.

King concludes her thesis with an assessment of goals achieved and challenges. Both her artist's statement and series follow in the Appendix.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Kenneth L. Smith for taking this adventure with me.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my committee: Brent Webb for rising to the challenge of being an advisor for a photographer, Carlee Bradbury for her thoughtful approach to my varied historical interests, Rebecca Ghezzi for her printmaking encouragement, and Andrew Ross for his enthusiasm for teaching, photography, and honesty.

I am also grateful to the faculty from the Radford University Department of Art and Dean Margaret Devaney for their support, empathy, and advice throughout my graduate years.

I would like to acknowledge the people who took part in my social content curation experiment and provided feedback to help narrow down the work included in this project. Their insight was so helpful.

And a special thank you to the artists who allowed me to use their images as stamps for my postcards. They are Langley Anderson, Frank Gilbert, Leah Gose, James Harman, Meg Greene Malvasi, Álex Moral, Julia Osborne, Mary Ann Persinger Nease, Mary Lou Reed, Fran Scher, Mark Scher, and Kenneth L. Smith.

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## CHAPTER 1—INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

### Influences: Nick Bantock

My mother handed me the last box under the Christmas tree, and I paused before opening it, trying to guess at its contents. All I knew as I undid the last strands of tape and ribbon is that I wanted the magic of the moment to remain. I figured the gift was probably a sweater. Little did I know the package's contents would have a long-lasting, profound impact.

As I peeled away the purple tissue paper; I saw the box held three books, the *Griffin and Sabine* trilogy<sup>123</sup> by Nick Bantock. Immediately I consumed this unusual love story between two artists, but even more so by the storytelling format of letters and postcards. Read over 25 years ago, this would become the inspiration for my M.F.A. thesis exhibition.

When I started *Postcards from the Pandemic: A Pulaski Memoir*, telling the story of an



<sup>1</sup> Nick Bantock, spread from *Griffin and Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991).

Appalachian COVID-19 experience began as visual diary entries. As I thought about creating a formal series of images for my thesis exhibition, Bantock's work crept into my consciousness. What if I transposed my diary, the recording of my life experiences using iPhoneography and

Instagram, into a story? Bantock's fictitious Griffin nagged at my creative consciousness. What

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Bantock, *Griffin and Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Nick Bantock, *Sabine's Notebook: In Which the Extraordinary Correspondence of Griffin and Sabine Continues* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Nick Bantock, *The Golden Mean: In Which the Extraordinary Correspondence of Griffin and Sabine Concludes* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).



if, rather than excerpts from my diary, I expanded my series into a similar format as Bantock's trilogy?

After reading Linda Richards' interviews with Bantock for *January Magazine*, the following statement about his motivation for putting words and images together resonated:

What you're looking at is a left brain, right brain split in individuals, not only in society. Essentially what I'm trying to do by marrying words and images is to try and bring the two back together again. Because I feel more comfortable with my whole sense of day and night, my left brain and my right brain and my two major forms of perception. Perception in terms of image and perception in terms of text language. And I don't want them to be split. I want them to belong together as a single uniform way of perceiving and understanding.<sup>4</sup>

As I conceptualized what *Postcards from the Pandemic* would become, I knew I needed to marry words and pictures to tell the story of the COVID-19 pandemic from my perspective. Unlike Bantock, I used a single point of view. I envisioned the totality of my project from the viewpoint of a person discovering a stash of old postcards. In such experiences, one rarely gets the luxury of knowing how the recipient responded. The viewer instead can only imagine the response. In this way, the story becomes more immersive as the viewer wonders about the identities behind the words.

### **Influences: Photography during the 1918 Pandemic**

*Postcards from the Pandemic* is creative non-fiction. My desire to preserve the history of both large and small COVID-19-related events inspires it. This pandemic was a great disruptor and agent of change, and the historian and documentarist within me sees the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Richards, "The Art and Fictions of Nick Bantock," *January Magazine*, 1998, <http://januarymagazine.com/profiles/bantock1998.html>.

creating a narrative. To understand the enormity of this time, I looked back at the historical work made by photographers in 1918 during the influenza pandemic, which coincided with World War One. These included Edward Steichen, a Photo-Secessionist up to that point in time. Photo-secessionists were an early twentieth century group of American photographers devoted to pictorial photography, and asserted photography's right to be considered an art form, as a medium of individual expression.<sup>5</sup> In opposition to this movement, I included Lewis Hine, and then I culminated my analysis with Alfred Stieglitz.

I had seen Edward Steichen's images from World War One, when he served as a major in



the Photographic Section of the U.S. Air Service.<sup>6</sup> In one cloudy landscape of ruins surrounded by a field, a plane flies above the field. For me, his *Ruins of Apremont (St. Mihiel Sector)*<sup>7</sup> is both hopeful and tragic. This image is in an album compiled by Steichen, now housed at the Art Institute

2 Edward Steichen, *Ruins of Apremont (St. Mihiel Sector)*, 1918/19, silver gelatin print in an unnamed album, Art Institute of Chicago, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://archive.artic.edu/steichen/category/world-war-i-album/index.html>.

of Chicago, which offers a digital archive of it. Its narrative describes the image:

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, edited by Richard Whelan and Sarah Greenough (New York: Aperture, 2000), 154. This is a reprint of "The Photo-Secession" in Bausch and Lomb Lens Souvenir (Rochester, New York: Bausch and Lomb Optical, 1903).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Steichen's *World War 1 Years*, Art Institute of Chicago, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://archive.artic.edu/steichen/category/world-war-i-album/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Steichen, "Ruins of Apremont (St. Mihiel Sector), 1918/19," *Edward Steichen's World War 1 Years*, Art Institute of Chicago, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://archive.artic.edu/steichen/3-ruins-of-apremont-st-mihiel-sector-191819/index.html>.

While the sites included by Steichen in his album do not depict the most significant battlefields of the First World War, they do reflect the AEF's [American Expeditionary Forces] involvement in the conflict. The St. Mihiel sector was the location of the first American-led offensive of the war and was considered a proving ground for the AEF. The Americans' strategic plan integrated airplane squadrons for both bombing and observation missions, and as a result was one of the largest air battles of the war.

Without showing images of humanity itself, this scene shows both a moment of devastation, seen in the form of the ruins, and atmosphere, depicted through its tonalities. This is what I strived to do with my *Postcards from the Pandemic*.

But it is Steichen's attitude and reflections upon his role in the war right after the Armistice that also inspired me. Although he wrote about the trauma and horrors of the war and not specifically about the pandemic in his memoir *A Life in Photography*,<sup>8</sup> he expounded on why art is important during times of strife. He wrote, "A state of depression remained with me for days, but gradually there came a feeling that, perhaps, in the field of art, there might be some way of making an affirmative contribution to life. This thought restored some sanity and hope, and the desire to live took hold again."

Lewis Hine also documented the pandemic and World War One in France for the Red Cross.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this, he was a groundbreaking image maker who photographed the plight of American child laborers. So powerful were his images that his photographs helped convince government officials to create and strictly enforce laws against child labor.<sup>10</sup> As cited in the International Photo Hall of Fame, "The impact of these photographs on social reform was

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 93.

<sup>9</sup> Daile Kaplan, *Lewis Hine in Europe: The Lost Photographs* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> "Lewis Hine," International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://iphf.org/inductees/lewis-hine>.

immediate and profound. They also inspired the concept of art photography, not because of the subject matter, but because the images showed a stark truth that dramatically differed from an emerging artistic character.”



3 Lewis Hine. *Scene in the Corridor Military Hosp.*, 1918, scan from glass negative, 5 in. X 7 in. Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017672534/>.

This is where our work differs. He shows humanity, choosing instead to photograph people. Though he began as a Photo-Secessionist, influenced by Alfred Stieglitz, he questioned Pictorialism styling. The text from his entry into the Hall of Fame, highlights this: “The characteristics of this type of

photography [Pictorialism] were romanticized images produced in a ‘soft-focus.’ Trickery of the actual image-making and its production were the heart of creating this type of photography. Hine once questioned the group's artistic methods, from their ivory tower, how could they see way down to the substrata of it all? Hine, from the beginning, considered his photography as an educational tool in addition to an art form. For Hine, the art of photography lay in its ability to interpret the everyday world, that of work, of poverty, of factory, street, household.”<sup>11</sup> Though he interpreted the world from a different visual perspective, I view the ivory tower of emotive atmosphere as a way of portraying a sense of place and time in a less literal sense.

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<sup>11</sup> “Lewis Hine.”



4 Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1918, palladium print, 9.49 in. X 7.6 in. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/66435/georgia-o-keeffe>.

After reading about Hines, I knew I needed to check-in with my biggest inspiration—Stieglitz. When looking at his photography during the 1918 Pandemic, he was exploring a new aesthetic direction that involved a figurative series of Georgia O'Keeffe. According to Cynthia Close, who wrote in “Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Love and Art Amidst the Spanish Flu” for *Art & Object*, “Although Stieglitz created over 300 photographs of O'Keeffe throughout their long relationship, it was in 1918, when the heat of their love was

brand new and the world was in chaos, that his camera lens became the instrument of his passion, exploring every inch of her face, her long graceful limbs and naked body often in languid repose. It was her illness that ultimately united them, as Stieglitz helped her recover and was thus forced out of his marriage.”<sup>12</sup>

So, he turned to his muse and created art, but this series also changed him, and his approach to photography. The more he photographed O'Keeffe, the more he moved out of the atmospheric and blurry work of his Pictorialism days. He found a voice in the unmanipulated image. In a letter to Sadakichi Hartmann in 1919, he wrote, “I am at last photographing again... It is straight. No tricks of any kind.—No humbug.—No sentimentalism.—Not old nor new.—It

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<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Close, “Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Love and Art Amidst the Spanish Flu,” *Art & Object*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.artandobject.com/news/georgia-okeeffe-and-alfred-stieglitz-love-and-art-amidst-spanish-flu>.

is so sharp that you can see the [pores] in a face—& yet it is abstract... It is a series of about 100 pictures of one person—heads & ears—toes—hands—torsos—It is the doing of something I had in mind for very many years.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Pictorialism Tried and True**

Although I highlight these three photographers to provide examples of how they handled image-making during a pandemic and explored their passions, their earlier work in Pictorialism is the real inspiration for my series, *Postcards from the Pandemic*. By working with the light, shadow, and focal planes of the landscape, I can change the atmosphere, documenting the feeling and mood, the emotion of the present. As described by the Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, in some agreement to Hine, Pictorialists “often preferred romantic or idealized imagery over the documentation of modern life, welcoming artistic composition and soft focus. They labored in the darkroom to produce unique works of art, employing time-consuming processes, such as gum bichromate printing and photogravure, that showed the artist’s hand.”<sup>14</sup>

When Steichen first became enamored with photography, Pictorialism seemed a natural place to begin. He found himself drawn to evening and night nature scenes. He wrote in his autobiography:

To me, the mood and the lyric feeling aroused in relation to the woods seemed more important. Because I found nature most beautiful in twilight and moonlight, all my efforts were directed towards finding a way of interpreting such moments. By taking a streetcar

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<sup>13</sup> “Alfred Stieglitz to Sadakichi Hartmann, April 27, 1919,” Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, box 23, folder 546.

<sup>14</sup> The Alfred Stieglitz Collection: Pictorialism, Art Institute of Chicago, accessed November 7, 2020, <https://archive.artic.edu/stieglitz/pictorialism/>.

out to the end of the line and walking a short distance, I could find a few woodlots. These became my stomping grounds, especially during autumn, winter and early spring. They were particularly appealing on gray or misty days, or very late in the afternoon and at twilight. Under those conditions the wood had moods, and the moods aroused emotional reactions that I tried to render in photographs. I made many experiments lengthening or



5 Edward Steichen, *Midnight Lake George*, 1904, gum bichromate over platinum print, 15.43 in. x 19.92 in., from the Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, accessed March 2, 2021 <https://archive.artic.edu/steichen/pictorialism-1900-1913/index.html>.

shortening the time of exposure, making the prints darker or lighter, changing the time of development. Some experiments led to a better rendering of mood, but several accidents also contributed.”<sup>15</sup>

In *Postcards from the Pandemic*, Pulaski and the New River Valley are my stomping grounds, as Steichen would say.

Though I have not chosen specific times or only nature-based scenery, my images are interpretations of mood overlaid against time and place. Like Steichen, I use exposure in a similar result. My work begins as a digital photograph and I use modern technology, such as smart phone applications and software such as Hipstamatic and Adobe Photoshop to manipulate the light and shadows and selective focus.

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<sup>15</sup> Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, 17.



6 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Hand of Man*, 1902, photogravure, 9.5 in. x 12.5 in., from the Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://archive.artic.edu/steichen/pictorialism-1900-1913/index.html>.

But, when recording that which first inspired my passion for Pictorialism and learning about photogravure, it was Stieglitz's *The Hand of Man* image. This was the first Pictorialist image I remember encountering in an undergraduate photo

history course. Its murky grittiness of a train yard with a locomotive traveling toward the foreground made me realize photography could be more than just documentation or tableau. It made me realize a photographer could affect atmosphere through manipulation. As the Metropolitan Museum of Art wrote in its digital catalog, "The title alludes to this modern transformation of the landscape and also perhaps to photography itself as a mechanical process. Stieglitz believed that a mechanical instrument such as the camera could be transformed into a tool for creating art when guided by the hand and sensibility of an artist."<sup>16</sup>

George Davidson, a prominent Pictorialist from England and founder of the Linked Ring Brotherhood, the British equivalent to the American Photo-Secessionist, manipulated his photographs with selective focus. He did this to emulate how the eye sees nature.<sup>17</sup> His *The*

<sup>16</sup> "The Hand of Man," *The MET 150*, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/269461>.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Harding. "Davison, George (1854–1930)," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-century Photography*, edited by John Hannavy (London: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, n.d.).



*Onion Field* photogravure fully employs this technique and presents something more than an image of a field. The Art Gallery of New South Wales Photography in Australia owns the version of this image from Stieglitz’s *Camera Works*. The gallery offers this description of



7 George Davidson, *The Onion Field 1890* from *Camera Work*, no 8, 1907, photogravure, 6 in. x 8 in. image; 7.6 in. x 10.4 in. sheet, from the Art Gallery NSW Collection, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/111.1979/>

Davidson’s work: he “adapted these [Pictorialist] theories to espouse an impressionist esthetic. He believed photography to be in a unique position to evoke nature through direct experience which, when distilled by an artistic sensibility and handling of the medium, could provide an enhanced impression of nature by portraying its essence.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2011, I purchased a paperback compilation of *Camera Work*,<sup>19</sup> wherein Davidson’s *The Onion Field* was first published. *Camera Work* was a photogravure-based quarterly magazine that Stieglitz edited. I became enthralled with the photogravure process—the way a photograph looks printed in ink on paper, rather than emulsions and plastics. Lisa Hostetler from the Department of Photographs for the Metropolitan Museum of Art describes *Camera Work* as a “sumptuous publication—illustrated with handsomely printed photogravures on Japanese rice paper hand-tipped to the pages—became a clarion call to photographers throughout the

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<sup>18</sup> “The Onion Field 1890, from *Camera Work*, no 8, April 1907,” *Art Gallery of New South Wales Photography Collection Handbook*, 2007, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/111.1979/?tab=about>.

<sup>19</sup> Pamela Roberts and Alfred Stieglitz. *Alfred Stieglitz: Camera Works, the Complete Illustrations 1903-1917* (Koln: Taschen, 1997).

country...”.<sup>20</sup> Stieglitz’s attitude toward fine art printing stimulated my desire to learn photogravure printing and why this is my chosen medium for this series. Julia Thompson, who wrote the text for Stieglitz’s *Portfolios and Other Published Photographs* for the National Museum of Art, discussed the importance of the photogravure process Stieglitz used for his two seminal publications of *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, versus other photo-mechanical processes. Thompson references *Camera Work 1906: An Announcement*<sup>21</sup> when she writes, “Stieglitz saw photogravures not as reproductions but rather as equivalents of the original prints, as they were made ‘directly from the original negatives and printed in the spirit of the original picture and retaining all its quality.’”<sup>22</sup>

### **Inspiration: Photo-mechanical Processes and Tourism Postcards**

When I began conceiving of how to tell the *Postcards from the Pandemic* story, a memory from Carlee Bradbury’s History of the Book course surfaced. She had us think about collecting books and share one from our own personal collection. At the time I purchased a book of English landscape rotogravure postcards in book form. I no longer have that publication, but my takeaway was the idea of a collection of images that represented England at a particular time in the format of postcards. As I made images of Pulaski, I knew I was documenting a historic period. The crossover of ideas, the image as fine art and expendable postcard, brings the series to a level that is, perhaps, more approachable.

The printing of early 1900s postcards and other photo-illustrated publications such as magazines, weekly newspaper supplements, and posters used a process known as rotogravure,

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<sup>20</sup> Lisa Hostetler, “Pictorialism in America,” *The MET 150*, October 2004, [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pict/hd\\_pict.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pict/hd_pict.htm).

<sup>21</sup> “Camera Work 1906: An Announcement,” *Camera Work* 11 (July 1905), unpaginated.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Thompson, “Stieglitz’s *Portfolios and Other Published Photographs*,” *National Gallery of Art: NGA Online Editions Alfred Stieglitz Key Set*

which is photogravure for mass-produced items.<sup>23</sup> According to authors Stulik and Kaplan, who wrote a photogravure process manual for curators and conservators for the Getty Museum, “The rotogravure process was used for the printing of postcards and became widespread only during the early part of the twentieth century, when newspapers adopted the new technology.

Rotogravure allowed for high-quality halftone reproductions printed at high speed on a variety of paper stocks.”<sup>24</sup>

But it is Fred Bassett, a senior librarian in the New York State Library’s Manuscripts and Special Collections, who describes the importance of postcards prior to the 1918 pandemic in “Wish You Were Here!: The Story of the Golden Age of Picture Postcards in the United States”:

Picture postcards were more than just a means of communication; they provided a portrait of life in America, especially life in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Postcards were produced for every occasion. At a time when newspapers (especially in small towns) carried few if any photographs, the postcard offered an incredibly inexpensive and convenient way to capture people, places, and events. Whenever America paraded or celebrated anything, the postcard photographer was there. He was also there when disasters—fires, floods, earthquakes, train wrecks—occurred. The political climate and figures of the time were also recorded, as were the prohibition and suffrage movements. Furthermore, the postcard reflected the attitudes, pastimes, sentiments, and tastes of the American people.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Dusan Stulik and Art Stulik, *Photogravure: The Atlas of Analytical Signatures of Photographic Processes* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust: 2013), 3, [https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/pdf\\_publications/pdf/atlas\\_photogravure.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/atlas_photogravure.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Stulik and Stulik, *Photogravure*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Bassett, “Wish You Were Here!: The Story of the Golden Age of Picture Postcards in the United States,” *Postcard Collection - Appendix C*, New York State Library, updated August 16, 2016, <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/qc16510ess.htm>.

In this way, my images provide a portrait of life, recording the COVID-19 Pandemic, as I have photographed the world around me and its atmosphere.

### **The Stamp Project**

There is the community aspect of *Postcards from the Pandemic*—the Stamp Project. In working with the idea of postcards, to create a suspension of disbelief for the viewer, I needed to add stamps. Because stamps come in different sizes and represent a variety of artistic subjects and styles, I invited other artists to create these for my postcards. This has the added effect of providing a broader swatch of issues, art, and photography happening now. As to the importance of stamps, the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum text for its *Art of the Stamp* exhibit stated, “Working on unusually small canvases, these artists surmount truly unique design challenges to create superb miniature encapsulations of American culture and history.”<sup>26</sup>

## **CHAPTER 2—RATIONALE AND REASON**

*Postcards from the Pandemic: A Pulaski Memoir* provides an artistic interpretation and documentation of the COVID-19 era, as told through a series of photopolymer gravures and a one-sided correspondence-based narrative through postcards. Aware that the pandemic is one of the most unusual events to happen in our lifetimes, I encapsulated the atmosphere and emotions surrounding 2020-21. My project involved the following techniques, content, and approaches: daily digital photography, photopolymer gravures, a narrative as expressed as postcard correspondence, and an adjunct community-building stamp project.

When the world went into lockdowns and physical isolation, I rededicated myself to my daily photographic diary. Each day, I used my iPhone 8 to photograph the landscapes witnessed

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<sup>26</sup> *The Art of the Stamp*, Smithsonian National Postal Museum, accessed on November 14, 2020, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/art-of-the-stamp>.

during my walks or errands. Most images reflected Pulaski, Virginia, although others were from trips to get allergy shots, drop off artwork for exhibitions, take a staycation, or from the times I went to my place of employment. Because of the complex nature of travel during a pandemic, I knew I needed to create work for my M.F.A. thesis exhibition in a local environment and complete the work in my home studio. My daily images were the perfect solution.

The events and moments surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that I include within this body of work are creative non-fiction, although I granted myself liberties with the storytelling and preservation of history, compacting it and massaging it into a storyline. When considering what to include, perhaps an archivist dilemma at heart—what to save, what to tell, and what to hold back, I kept an ongoing list of personal and universal defining topics. I collected these from headlines in the news, conversations with my neighbors and family, and Instagram. From this list, I narrowed down the items that were meaningful to me, allowing me to keep a voice of authenticity. The result is an archive of images and words from one perspective.

I also wanted the viewpoint to resonate with a general audience. I incorporated as many general themes as possible for my two characters to experience. I used a timeline to travel the story from a beginning to an end—the realization the Coronavirus was a concern to the promise of inoculation. ME wrote the postcards about daily life experiences, as though this has long been a way for the two to communicate.

Because of the volatile nature of subjects revolving around the pandemic, I made what felt like a tough decision to be true to my inner narrative. In my journal, which is public through Instagram, I balance professionalism and emotion to create a more inclusive space, often avoiding politics, religion, and sex. With this series, I put myself in a different mindset, that of an intimate conversation. B.J. and ME have a long history. They know each other's politics and

religious views. It is a safe space for ME, but there is an awareness that privacy is an illusion with postcards, as opposed to sealed letters.

Over the summer of 2020, I attended a virtual lecture by Brandy Faulkner, Collegiate Assistant Professor of political science, and Gloria D. Smith, Professor of Black Studies at Virginia Tech. She is an advocate for diversity and imparted much wisdom surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. She helped me understand the disparities between the races and the need to be thoughtful in how one takes part in such advocacy. So, I chose to include a few cards about social justice and contributing to the movement. I worried others might interpret these as virtue signaling, but I remembered another lecture I attended in 2017 by Sue Coe. She gave a keynote address at the Southern Graphics Council annual conference. Coe does her activism through illustration and printmaking and she implored the audience to use their artistic voice to demand and create change. I have thought about her words and how I could contribute to a cause. Then when I heard Faulkner speak, I decided I had to include my true thoughts into the narrative. This also went beyond racial issues, but those of religion and politics.

I purposefully created amorphous characters with the intention that viewers would experience them in whatever gender they wanted to bestow upon B.J. and ME. When I conceived of doing this, it was less about the feminine and masculine than making the pair a point of curiosity and greater interest. At certain points, there are moments that may seem like specific male or female stereotypes—such as giving flowers or going to tea, but I see gender as a sliding scale within each being. Psychotherapist Trish Toal describes this in a post on the Mind and Body Works website: “A ‘Gender Spectrum’ represents a more nuanced model where gender exists beyond a simple male/female binary model but instead exists on a continuum that can move more fluidly between masculine and feminine allowing people to identify with a more

authentic model of their gender.”<sup>27</sup> So, sometimes B.J. may seem male and at other times female, as with ME.

I could have digitally printed a portfolio of these photographs, but instead opted to encompass the many explorations and experiences in the six years I have worked toward this degree. Although I have become proficient in printmaking techniques ranging from carborundum printing to silkscreen, I am a devotee of photopolymer gravure. For me, it is the iteration of a history of photo-mechanical processes, mainly photogravure, but it is a more environmentally friendly and less toxic form of gravure. This appeals to the part of me that feels as an artist I need to be a responsible steward to our environment. But the ultimate result of photopolymer gravure prints is I can create images that have qualities that harken back to Pictorialism, in which the viewer may wonder if they are seeing an image made in the early twentieth century. This juxtaposition of time, between two eras of pandemics, is my way of documenting the seriousness of the present without directly showing visuals of the ravages of the virus.

I am also very interested in the intersection of words and pictures in storytelling. My other works have included poetry and images in book form. For *Postcards from the Pandemic*, I told the story of pandemic tropes through a one-way postcard correspondence. I imagined these missives being found in the future, perhaps in a dusty attic trunk, tied together by a green-faded silk ribbon. The finder may wonder about the writer and the intended recipient; I intentionally leave my correspondent vague by using the initials B.J. Is this a mother, brother, friend, or lover? I leave it to the viewer to decide, hoping that they will take on the role of B.J. I left the signature

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<sup>27</sup> Trish Toal, “The Gender Spectrum,” *Mind and Bodyworks*, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://mindandbodyworks.com/the-gender-spectrum/>.

vague as well, signed by ‘ME.’ Maybe I, as the artist, am the writer or maybe I transcend to an everyman status.

Although I framed the photography, a postcard back accompanies each image, substituting as a label. Designed to look like a historic postcard, each one tells a different archetypal story from the pandemic, based on my personal experiences. In this way, the work is creative non-fiction. Each postcard includes cancellation postal marks and a stamp.

### **Social Content Curation Defined**

To help narrow down the image selection, I opted to use social content curation. I narrowed down my ultimate audience for the project—art buyers, museum and gallery directors, curators, historians, art enthusiasts, photographers, artists, creatives, and my thesis committee. Thirty people from these groups volunteered to participate. I created an online Qualtrics survey that allowed the participants to rate 57 of the images using a three-star system. One-star equaled no. Two represented maybe, and three stars was a definite for inclusion. There was also a comment area for specific feedback for each image. Qualtrics provided me with a report of the average score of each image. A majority of images included in this project were the top scoring images. I deviated by adding earlier work in the series, printed in the fall of 2020 for other exhibitions. Plus, there were a few images I felt needed to help progress the overall narrative.

### **The Stamp Project Defined**

The last part of this project involves a community building exercise called the Stamp Project. Because when sending postcards, stamps are the avenue of commerce that gets those cards from point A to point B. They are also very diverse in subject and style, often telling their own stories. To create a more authentic visual experience for the viewer, I knew the stamps on the postcards would need to reflect the diversity of artists and subject matter beyond my own



visual voice. With this in mind, I curated a series of artist-created stamps to go on the postcards. I invited artists from my personal networks to take part and put the call out through Instagram and Facebook. I also credited each artist on the postcard that includes their stamp.

## CHAPTER 3—METHODS, MEDIA, AND FORMAT

### The Images

There are four elements to the visuals in *Postcards from the Pandemic*. These include the digital images, the photopolymer gravures, the postcard backs and text, and the stamps. Each element involves its own method, mediums, and formatting.

Sizing is the one concept that connects these elements. Once I had decided on the overall theme of postcards, I needed to consider the dimensions. I began by looking up the general size of postcards. The general parameters for modern postcards are that they must be rectangular, at least 3.5 inches high by 5 inches long and no larger than 4.25 inches high by 6 inches long.<sup>28</sup> To help narrow down my options with this, I looked at the general size of postcards in the early 1900s. According to the New York State Library's postcard collection website, "... privately printed postcards could have dimensions of 3.50 inches x 5.50 inches like most of the cards published in Europe at the time."<sup>29</sup> I compared this ratio to that of my uncropped digital images, which on my iPhone equaled 3.75 inches by 5 inches. To keep the original digital ratio intact, I went with modern postcard sizing. Therefore, the overall postcard size is 3.75 inches by 5 inches. These are also my final measurements of the photopolymer gravures and the postcard labels. My stamps are the same as modern-sized stamps, which vary.

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<sup>28</sup> "Sizes for Postcards," *USPS.COM Postal Explorer*, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://pe.usps.com/businessmail101?ViewName=Cards>.

<sup>29</sup> "A Short History of Picture Postcards in the United States," *Postcard Collection - Appendix A*, New York State Library, updated July 28, 2016, <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/qc16510hist.htm>.

My initial images started as digital photographs from my iPhone 8. With my iPhone, I made standard color images using Apple's camera controls to adjust lighting. I then use a combination of smart phone applications including Hipstamatic, Distressed Photo, and Adobe Photoshop Elements to affect the lighting, focal plane, and distressed look. Then I imported these into Adobe Photoshop to further enhance the contrast and shadows to create the atmosphere.

After manipulating the images, I turned them into Photopolymer gravures. This is an intaglio printmaking process that uses sunlight or UV light and water to etch an image into a light-sensitive printmaking plate. The pre-coated photopolymer plate goes through a non-traditional etching process. Ann D'Arcy Hughes and Hebe Vernon-Morris in *The Printmaking Bible* describes Intaglio as a means to engrave or cut into and refers to image creation through gouging or incising lines into the surface of a metal plate.<sup>30</sup> Unlike traditional etching, which requires acids or engraving with a burin tool to gouge lines into the plate, a photopolymer plate only needs UV light and water to incise the image into the surface.

For *Postcards from a Pandemic*, I used a method called direct-to-plate photopolymer gravure. I studied this process during a workshop from its inventor, Don Messec.<sup>31</sup> For this, I used Solarplates, which come with a photopolymer emulsion already applied to them. In *Printmaking in the Sun*, Dan Weldon and Pauline Muir state: "The surface layer of the plate is composed of light sensitive polymer, which is also soluble in water. Wherever ultraviolet light strikes the surface of the plate, the polymer hardens, while the parts of the polymer blocked from the light by the opaque lines and marks of the drawing remains soluble."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ann D'Arcy Hughes and Hebe Vernon-Morris, *The Printmaking Bible: A Complete Guide To Materials and Techniques* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Don Messec (photographer/printmaker) in Direct-to-Plate Photopolymer Gravure Workshop, May 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Weldon and Pauline Muir, *Printmaking in the Sun: An Artist's Guide to Making Professional-Quality Prints using the Solarplate Method* (New York, Watson-Guption Publications, 1997), 11.

Once exposed to light, the authors explain, the plate is gently scrubbed in tap water to wash remove any soluble residue, leaving the surface etched.<sup>33</sup> Once dry, more UV light exposure helps the emulsion to harden on the plate.<sup>34</sup>

Enter Messec's contributions into the photopolymer gravure process.<sup>35</sup> A Solarplate requires a certain coarseness for the gravure process to work. Messec explained that a natural coarseness occurs through etched dots on the plate that hold ink. When printing with Epson Stylus Pro printers, these create a randomized native dot pattern that makes up the larger image. Messec found by printing directly onto a Solarplate, the Epson printer automatically creates the dot pattern. After being printed and etched onto the plate, between the fibrous printmaking paper and the Solarplate coming into contact with great pressure, the printed areas look like continuous tones and not a series of dots.

Once I created my plates, I began the actual printing process, using products made by Speedball. I started with a mixture of carbon black and burnt umber Akua Intaglio Inks. I chose these soy-based ink for their non-toxic properties.<sup>36</sup> Invented by Susan Roscoe and William Jung in the 1990s, "they discovered that the few water-based inks available dried too quickly and were not of professional quality. At that time there was not a single water-based ink on the market that was specifically made for wiping an intaglio plate or working a monotype plate with a long open time. They recognized that there was a growing demand from artists who wanted to make high quality prints without compromising their health."<sup>37</sup> I choose to print these on Arnhem 1618

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<sup>33</sup> Welden and Muir, *Printmaking in the Sun*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Welden and Muir, *Printmaking in the Sun*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Messec, Direct-to-Plate Photopolymer Gravure Workshop.

<sup>36</sup> Akua Intaglio Brochure, Speedball, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.speedballart.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Akua-Intaglio-Brochure.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> "Akua Inks – Made By Printmakers," Speedball, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.speedballart.com/our-product-lines/speedball-printmaking/akua-printmaking/akua-inks-made-by-printmakers/>.

paper, which is also a Speedball product, produced in a paper mill that has existed over 400 years. It speaks to me for the historic value, but it is also 100% rag based and acid-free with a vellum finish.<sup>38</sup> Rag paper refers to paper that is made from cotton, linen, flax, or hemp fibers, as opposed to wood pulp. It is chemically and mechanically stable and is extremely durable.<sup>39</sup>

### The Written Narrative

The postcard backs involve the card design and the correspondence. My design is derivative of cards from the time of the 1918 pandemic. Though the New York State University Postcard Collection states that “‘POSTCARD’ was granted by the government to private printers



8 Postcard example from 1915 to 1930 from the Postcard Collection at the New York State Library, accessed on March 2, 2021, <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/qc16510hist.htm>.

on December 4, 1901,” all its examples show the words “Post Card.”<sup>40</sup> So, I used this reference. Also, as its examples show, “... on March 1, 1907, postal regulations permitted postcards with divided backs, that is, with a printed vertical line down the middle to provide space for both the address and

correspondence. The right-hand side of the card was reserved exclusively for the address while the left-hand side could be used for writing a message.” My design also reflects this.

To emulate the look of historical fonts seen on traditional postcards from the early 1900s, I used Trattatello and Iowan Old Style on the actual design of the card. I deliberately did not

<sup>38</sup> Arnhem 1618® Paper, Speedball, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.speedballart.com/our-product-lines/paper/arnhem-1618/>

<sup>39</sup> Paper, Preservation Self-Assessment Program, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://psap.library.illinois.edu/collection-id-guide/paper#ragpaper>.

<sup>40</sup> “A Short History of Picture Postcards in the United States,” *Postcard Collection - Appendix A*, New York State Library, July 28, 2016, <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/qc16510hist.htm>.

match the fonts of any particular postcard printer from the era because they were all slightly different.

There is one other font included on the cards. I call it the lsking typeface, and I designed this based on my handwriting. It is the font I use for the correspondence part of the postcard. This gives me more control over the appearance. I can change the size and boldness of the letters to depict emotion, and it is infinitely more readable than my actual handwriting.

For exhibition, I printed the postcard backs on cardstock, mounted on foam core. Then I added the stamps with rubber cement and use a combination of Adobe InDesign software and stamps to create the cancelation marks.

### **The Stamps**

The stamps use current stamp design templates with slight modifications so as not to cause issues with postal service copyrights. I digitally downsized the art and printed them via a color inkjet printer. Using a pattern tracing wheel, I made the perforations around the exterior of each to create a more stamp-like finished quality. To adhere these to the postcards, I used One Coat rubber cement. The cancelation marks are a combination of symbols directly printed onto the postcards at the time of printing and then hand-stamping the wavy lines over the stamps.

## **CHAPTER 4—ASSESSMENT**

### **Goals Met**

Reflecting on the end product of *Postcards from the Pandemic*, I met many of my goals. I have created a cohesive narrative series of photopolymer gravure images in a Pictorialist style. For my thesis, I have included twenty-four photographs. The imagery offers both moments of

clarity and at other times, a lack of focus or haziness, which is how I characterize this odd time of the COVID era.

I have completed a written narrative through a one-sided correspondence that expresses the happenings of a year in isolation, and captures everyday life—the hopes, the fears, the reality—in my version of Appalachia. In using the images as the front side of postcards that show local scenes, the words of the correspondence give voice to time and events. Together the text and pictures serve as a documentation of the pandemic.

On a technical level, I grew as a printmaker. With the sheer volume of images, I refined my processes and honed my craft. I can now troubleshoot the entire printing process from creating the plates to printing them. Because photopolymer gravure is a light-sensitive process, I needed to adapt to the ever-changing qualities of light in my home studio, often working with plates in the early morning or evening hours. I also learned more about the care of my digital printers.

### **Learning from Challenges**

*Postcards from the Pandemic* is a large project with many moving parts. When I started this, I knew project management skills were going to be necessary. Starting with the images themselves, making photos every day for a year, produces hundreds of images. After spending a great deal of time trying to narrow them down—every day I felt differently about my choices—I knew I needed some feedback. That is when I utilized social content curation. This proved to be extremely helpful in understanding the strengths and weaknesses. But then I discovered I could not just rely on the top-rated images. I had neglected to add context to the survey process, so in telling a coherent story, the top-rated images did not always allow for a natural flow in storyline.

I also ran into technical problems. My source for photopolymer gravure plates informed me that his factory would no longer make the brand I preferred. I thought this would mean a supply chain issue, but I was able to stock-up on the plates and have enough to create the pieces included in this thesis. Then my main digital printer, which I used to put the image onto the light sensitive plate, stopped working. I learned how to do maintenance on a used secondary printer and complete the process.

The Stamp Project portion also did not go as I expected. Many people showed interest in creating stamps, but the numbers were less than I expected. What might have helped was starting this part of the project earlier and doing more following up with interested participants. I had to make a choice with the time I had to complete my thesis—move forward with my creative work or cultivate the stamp aspect. I chose the former, but am grateful for the stamps I received, along with the feedback from several of the artists that they felt they contributed to a worthy project.

With this ever-growing manifesto of the pandemic, this serves as my legacy of creative expression through pictures and words. With ink and paper, I have told my story. The adventure continues...

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## APPENDIX

### Artist Statement

Imagine stumbling upon a timeworn box of postcards. Maybe you are exploring a flea market, a museum archive, or even a dusty attic. A sense of voyeurism compels you to look closer and to read the one-sided correspondence on the cards. Perhaps you wonder about the writer, the addressee, and the images themselves. And maybe, just maybe, you find yourself time-traveling as you experience the life witnessed in these intimate missives.

This is the premise behind my *Postcards from the Pandemic: A Pulaski Memoir*. This series is my creative non-fiction interpretation of life in Appalachia during the COVID-19 pandemic, as imagined through intimate postcard-sized images and one side of a written correspondence. Each card features a black and white photograph with a backside written to a mysterious B.J. and signed by “ME.” Through these vagaries, I invite you into a shared world. Perhaps you wonder who B.J. was, or maybe you know. Perhaps you relate to the “ME,” who signed the cards. And as you think about it all, possibly you overlay my visual narrative over your own.

I began photographing my neighborhood during daily walks in March 2020, when social isolation became the normal way of life. These images are purposefully reminiscent of the photography prevalent during the 1918 pandemic, specifically Pictorialism. This turn-of-the-20th-century art movement employed photographic manipulation to heighten grain and increase shadows to enhance an image’s emotive and atmospheric qualities. Much like the end products of Pictorialism and early tourism memorabilia, I printed my artwork using a photo-mechanical process—photopolymer gravure, a modern incarnation of the historic photogravure practice.

I also incorporated a sub-enterprise into *Postcards from the Pandemic*, called the Stamp Project. I asked other artists to provide the artwork for the postage stamps. I did this to add reality to the cards, as stamps and their imagery is random, and many artists create them.

So, please take a deep breath and join me in my chronicles of our shared reality. Maybe you will be B.J. or maybe you will be “ME.”

Postcards from the Pandemic: A Memoir from Pulaski—The Series



227 Jefferson Avenue N, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

No sign of the 'Ronavirus. But get this - the university I work for is extending spring break by a week and then we move online for the rest of the semester. I get to work remotely, so hello, home office. I'm turning a corner of the studio into a writing nook. We "will Zoom" (a new verb for you) to meet online. It's virtual video and audio conferencing, so you can see everyone online. I wish you weren't so analog. I'd love to see you and hear your voice again like we're in the same room.

Always,  
 ME

P.S. The photo is of downtown Pulaski. I think it sums up the starkness of the now. Wish you were here.

POST CARD

PULASKI, VA  
 Address Only  
 MAR 16  
 2020

Architecture USA

B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Mark Scher

Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lakingsphotography.com

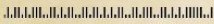


111 Sixth Street NE, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J,

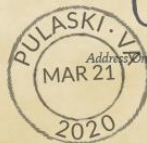
Today I went for my walk and there was a harshness to the light, as though winter was hanging on by its teeth. It felt passive aggressive (what would the kids call that abnormality now?) and was spiting its distaste for the new season in the form of sleet and permeating cold.

As I crossed paths with a neighbor, she carried a steaming travel mug of coffee. I thought of you and all those mornings of sleeping in late. I'd awaken to the scent of coffee and cinnamon and wait for you to bring me a cup in bed. And as I continued my walk today, I wanted nothing more than that coffee.

Always,  
 ME 

Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lakingsphotography.com

POST CARD



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Fran Scher



516 N Washington Avenue, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020  
 (I want these chairs!)

Dear B.J.,

Thank you for the beautiful irises (at least I am assuming they are from you). The flowers arrived, no note or anything, as I was dressing for another evening of Zoom cocktails. I feel a bit like I did during my Lilian Hellman years, when all I really wanted was to be Nora to my Nick. Going through vintage cocktail recipes tonight, I decided to dress the part of vintage high-couture to go with my Hemingway Daiquiri. It really is ashame you won't take the Internet plunge and join us. You would like my neighbors and our Saturday night social club ritual of logging-in and celebrating life with a good drink or three.

Anyway, thanks for remembering my birthday and for the flowers.

Always,  
 ME

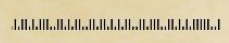
Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. König | lskingphotography.com

POST CARD  
 PULASKI - VA  
 APR 18  
 2020



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD  
 321028

Stamp Art by Fran Scher





Seventh Street NE, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

I'm proud of you for going to your local Black Lives Matter protest, even if you just sat in your car and watched. The close proximity of the activists without masks scares me a bit. To get to a rally, I would have to travel far and wide. So, I held my own mental vigil and composed letters to my congressmen. It doesn't feel like enough. And frankly, I worry that once the fervor of angry justice fades, life will be as it was before the rallies. Will change happen where it matters the most?

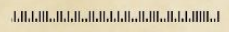
Always,  
 ME

Postcards from the President by L.S. King | lakingsphotography.com



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Mary Lou Reed








Scott Street, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020  
 Homage to Rosetta, the VW Van

Dear B.J.,

The week we all went into isolation, I went to my allergist. Yes, I'm back on the shots. It's been a year and I was getting them weekly. Now I go every two weeks, and it is harrowing. Though there are less people in the waiting room, very few wear masks. It wouldn't be so bad, but you have to wait in the office for 30 minutes before you can leave (in case you have a reaction).

But it was strange to drive again. No one was out on the roads and as I approached the suburban arm pit of our area, the parking lots were pretty empty. Maybe T.S. Eliot got it right. This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper.

Always,

ME 

Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lskingphotography.com

POST OFFICE  
 PULASKI VA  
 MAY 10  
 2020  
 Address Only



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD  
 321028

Stamp Art by Mark Scher



701-799 Jefferson Avenue N, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

On this first day of summer, my Converse All-stars (yes, it's time to get a new pair of what you call my spider stomping shoes, which we bought in another life so I didn't have to go all sandal-clad in the land of Brown Recluses) took me down the main roads rather than back alleys. Anything to stay in the shade.

This is a town full of old walls. I have always thought about them as fences, but I think here, it has to do with drainage and property support. These are the walls to have, ones that support life, not hold it back and separate us for each other. And yes, I finally saw the pictures of the White House and its walls. What has become of my poor home city?

Always,  
 ME

Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lskingphotography.com

POST CARD



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by James Harman





3666 Lee Highway, Pulaski #2, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.

So, you say I don't have to worry about virtue-signaling because my father was Jewish. Wow. You're playing that card after all these years? All I'm going to say is this has nothing to do with religious inclusivity at the moment. Yes, I faced antisemitism as child (or perhaps I was just a loner, eh?), and in some cases it does give me more empathy, but it makes me fighting mad when I come up against those who are purposefully ignorant. That peaceful, quiet side of me disappears, and my inner-warrior starts to surface. I know it repulses you, but I have to believe there is a reason for my angry energy.

Always and Angry,  
ME

Picture from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lakingsphotography.com

POST CARD



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Alex Moral





Meadow Creek Road, Christiansburg, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.  
Today I gave in. I decided to listen to you and take a staycation. As you've said it was time for a break when I started fantasizing about antibody test results that show I somehow already had COVID-19 and just didn't notice it. Perhaps I exposed everyone here to it, but nobody got sick or died. It's a good dream.  
Anyway, I'm headed to Floyd. More later...

Always,  
ME

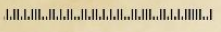
Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. King | lskingphotography.com

POST  
FLOYD  
JUL 16  
Address Only 2020



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Hyser, MD 321028

Stamp Art by L.S. King





Blue Ridge Parkway, Floyd, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.

Took the parkway to our favorite winery and it rained. I sipped red wine, sitting under an umbrella and wondered what you would make of me and my drenched hair and soggy sneakers. The things we do to stay six feet apart from everyone else.

Remember the first time we visited Floyd, drank a bottle of wine, and acted snotty about the crab cakes, but it turned out the chef was from the Chesapeake Bay?

I miss you.

Always,  
ME

Postcards from the Peninsula by L.S. King | lskingphotography.com



Address Only



B.J. Foreyer  
51 Stonyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by L.S. King





Rock Castle Gorge Overlook, Floyd, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

I know I said I went to Floyd, but I think I actually went to Brigadoon. Driving through the mountains and straight into clouds, I felt so free. It was like the world had continued, and suddenly this isolation, this avoidance of all things potentially COVID related, didn't matter. Alone isn't really alone, as you remind me, it is a choice. You can choose to be lonely or you can find your own quiet company enough.

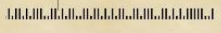
Wish you were here.  
Always,  
ME

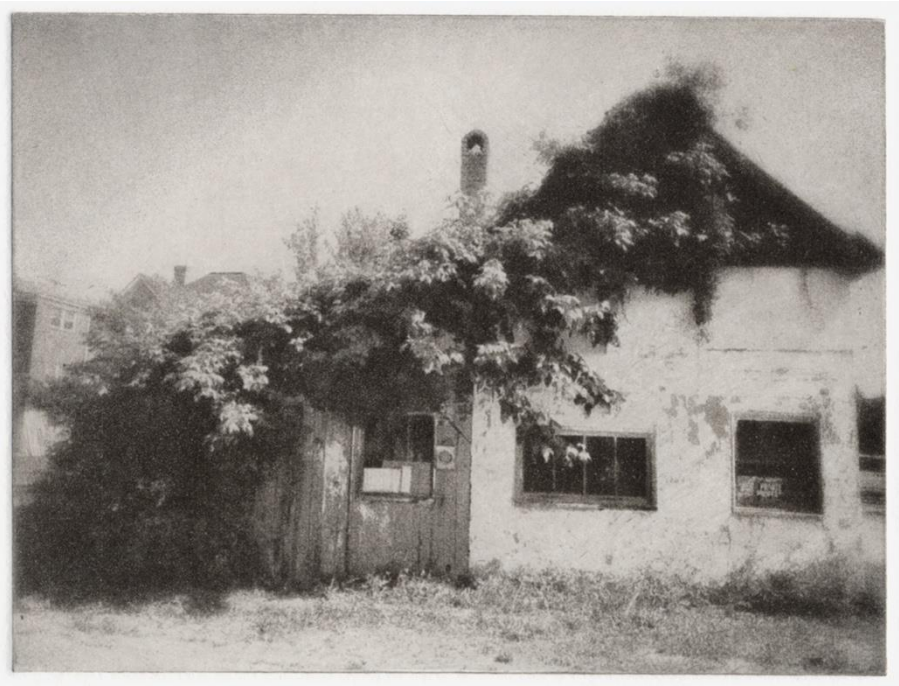


B.J. Forester  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD  
321028

Postcards from the Postmark by L.S. King | lskingphotography.com

Stamp Art by L.S. King





22 Randolph Avenue, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

So, you worried about me? My two week hiatus caused you to actually leave a phone message, not once but twice (and I know how much you hate using the phone, preferring the written word). Well, I am touched that you did. I often feel like I am writing letters to the void, so it's nice when the void responds. Just kidding - not. I'm fine, by the way. Just little depressed between spiking COVID numbers and the number of political signs and flag I see for the opposition during my walks. How's that for politically correct since you don't want to discuss it. At least abandoned buildings in town only have things like poison ivy and things that can be fixed... And there you go, out of room.

Always,  
ME

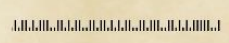
Postcards from the Penitentiary by J.S. King | inkingsphotography.com

POST CARD  
PULASKI - VA  
Address Only  
SEP 8  
2020



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Alex Moral





614 N Washington Avenue, Pulaski  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

Remember I told you I have lived with ghosts all my life - some I've known, some I don't? Do you know I feel much safer these days living in haunted houses than I do with the living, such as going to grocery stores? I don't get why wearing a mask has become a political statement. Either you care about your health and that of those around you, or you don't. I have no time for the latter. I think they are selfish and bullies. I can't believe someone tried to make you feel bad about wearing your mask when you went for a walk. Shame on them. Ask yourself if it is this someone who matters what they think of you? I think not. Best to put a lot of distance between you and them. Because really, I don't want to add you to my ghost collection.

Always,  
 ME



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by James Harman

Postcards from the President by J.S. King | inkstitchphotography.com





104 Sixth Street NE, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

This is what All Hallows Eve looks like here in my part of Appalachia.

I think it is sweet that you are volunteering to help with Wood Haven's drive through trick-or-treat event. Please wear the mask I sent you (and use the filters I included). I block printed the spiders (in honor of the brown recluses, really, but the black widow is prettier, don't you think?).

After my walk, I'm turning off my house lights, lighting a fire in the fireplace, eating gummy worms, and listening to audio books. No more politics, no more news, just laying low because "Hell is empty and all the devils are here."

Always,  
ME



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Langley Anderson



Postcards from the Piedmont by J.S. King | langleyphotography.com



176 Orphanage Drive, Max Meadows, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

*I can't believe you are actually going to your local polling station to vote today. Do you know there is a pandemic? I don't really care if it is a tradition, granted you did physically mail last year's taxes right before mid-night on April 15 (even though we all got an extension). I think you're doing this just for the hope of seeing political drama.*

*Me? I opted to vote early. I walked to the county's clerks office and did it there. At the time, there were only two of us voting. So, no lines like others have experienced. Let's hope the right candidate wins (and there is no malfeasance involved).*

*Today I am walking the New River Trail to Foster Falls! This building will eventually be a hotel! Hint. Hint.*

*Always,*

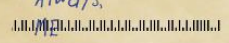
Postcards from the Parliament by J.S. King | inkingsphotography.com

POST CARD  
 MAX MEADOWS  
 Address Only  
 NOV 3  
 2020  
 VA



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Julia Osborne





New River, Shot Tower, Max Meadows, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J,  
Today was a warmish day, so I went out on the New River Valley Trail to sketch for a bit. As I sat in the autumn sun, my smartphone beeped. Compelled to look, I saw an amazing announcement that made me feel like I could breathe a bit easier. The presidential election has shifted and it looks like good ol' Joe Biden will take the White House in January. I sure hope he takes down the silly barricade around it. I know you'd prefer not to hear about my politics, but really, it's a good day. Hope you are enjoying it.

Always,  
ME

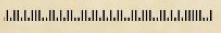
POST CARD

MAX MEAD  
Address Only  
NOV 7  
2020  
VA



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Leah Gose





3188 Old Route 100 Road, Draper, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

POST CARD



Dear B.J.,  
You were sweet to say you feel gratitude toward my long-haired self on this quiet Thanksgiving.  
Did you know this is pretty close to the anniversary of my last haircut. Just when I had committed to a short hair style, we have a pandemic. I'm not brave like you, though finding a stylist willing to come to your place and set up shop on your porch a few months ago was brilliant.  
Ah well, I'm grateful for the macaroni and cheese I wish I had made for dinner.  
And of course, I am ever grateful for you.

Always,  
ME

B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Leah Gose

Postcards from the President by J.S. King | kingphotography.com





707 N Washington Avenue, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

You know how I have that house crush? And remember I told you about wanting to sit on the porch and drink a cocktail there? Well, I did it!

I took my mug and filled it with Hot Buttered Rum. Then I walked over to the house. Donning my mask, I knocked on the door, and as expected there was no answer (what would I have done if someone had answered?). It doesn't look like anyone has been there for a long while. Brushing leaves off a chair, I sat down like I owned the place and drank my beverage in peace. But when I went to leave, I felt like someone was watching me. I have no evidence this was the case, but honestly, it was both thrilling and disturbing.

Always,

ME



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Meg Greene Malvasi

Postcards from the Penitentiary by J.S. King | inkingsphotography.com



7 Fifth Street NE, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2020

Dear B.J.,

*Tis the season... for getting the virus. Before you panic, no, I don't have it. You should recognize the signs of me stepping on my soap box. I am so glad we gave up the Sunday habit and 'Home Churched' According to the New River Valley Health District, there is a bit of a COVID-19 spread, and you can guess how - churches.*

*So, I thought you'd enjoy my dark not-a-cathedral image. It makes me think about the time we had tea at the National Cathedral. And that makes me miss those non-pandemic events, which does give me empathy for everyone who is missing their Sunday church habits.*

*Thinking about using this image for my holiday card. What do you think?*

Always  
ME



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Mary Ann Persinger Nease

Postcards from the Parliament by J.S. King | inklightphotography.com



849-851 New River Road, Christiansburg, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.,

Happy New Year!

Did you get the bottle of Moët & Chandon? (You're not very good at this repartee anymore. Do I bore you?) And don't even think of saving the libations until we can see each other again. They'll make more. Now that the vaccines are being made available I am hopeful we'll see each other come Spring. Did you sign-up for one yet? Oh, and happy 2021 from the Huckleberry Trail.

Always,  
 ME

POST CARD



B.J. Foreyer  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Mary Ann Persinger Nease

Postcards from the Penland by J.S. King | inkstamps.com



68 First Street NW, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.,

I am appalled by what is happening in our favorite city. I can't concentrate on my work today. How is it possible that a group of people think it is okay to enact violence and storm our Capitol. The sound bites often refer to "taking back our house." Well, you know what, B.J.? It's my house, too, and I say GET OUT. And it looks like they just walked in. Where was the push back from law enforcement that we saw during the peaceful protest of the summer? And those protesters, really? They are posing for selfies like tourists as they try to take down the government.

I chose this image because it always reminds me of the route the bus used to take into DC, but it's Pulaski.

Always,



Postcards from the Parliament by J.S. King | inkingsphotography.com

POST CARD

Address Only

PULASKI · VA  
 JAN 6  
 2021

B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Frank Gilbert





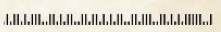
45 W Main Street, Pulaski, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.,

The cats thank you for their care package of canned pate (since there seems to be a shortage of such things). And I thought your creativity in making the cans resemble a flower was very Valentine's Day (and you know I love the handmade Victorian origami - what is that called again? - and the ruby earrings hidden inside.)

But, on a different note: before sending me propaganda, B.J., please check the facts and sources against real world info. There is a divide between truth and alternate facts (yes, creative non-fiction). Was it one opinion or something that really happened? Just because a talking head says it, that doesn't make it true. As you once told me in your more liberal days, when it comes to religion, one needs to read the whole story and not just a passage taken out of context. I beg you to be mindful of this. But I love you anyway.

Always,

ME 

Postcards from the Pandemic by L.S. Kling | makingphotography.com



B.J. Forever  
51 storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Mark Scher



I-81, Wytheville, VA  
Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.,  
What if all the creepiness I feel these days - such as being watched or followed, and the random ringing of my doorbell is not human, not supernatural, but extraterrestrial? A friend of mine from Wytheville wrote a book years ago about all the UFOs he saw flying over I-81 in this area. He and a reporter from Roanoke documented several cases.

Is this plausible? Perhaps the aliens are amongst us now? Maybe they come bearing a cure for COVID and in my fear, I'm missing a prime opportunity to save the world?

Always,  
ME

Postcards from the President by J.S. King | inkingsphotography.com



B.J. Forever  
51 Storyland Road  
Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Meg Greene Malvasi





Washington Avenue S, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.

Have the aliens abducted you?  
 Seriously, **WRITE BACK!** I'm having  
 a hard time quelling the panic and the  
 feeling of being left out (notice I leave  
 FOMO to the kids on social media) for the  
 inoculations.

You told people about your asthma, yes?  
 A couple of my friends are on the inoculation  
 list because they have asthma (and they  
 are under 40). Remember when Joe Flying By  
 on the Standing Rock Reservation relieved  
 me of my asthma symptoms for my young  
 adult years? Wish he could have helped you.

Wish I could be inoculated and come to  
 see you. Please write back.

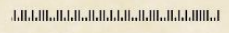
Always,  
 ME

POSTCARD



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Fran Scher



Postcard from the Postcard by J.S. King | kingphotography.com



302 N Washington Avenue, Pulaski, VA  
 Photopolymer Gravure, 2021

Dear B.J.,  
 It is spring again without you. And I do not write of flowers. I write of crows. Remember when I told you that for me they are a harbinger of change? I've been noticing them quite a lot recently. Whether or not I face their truths, I know life is about to take me on a new path. But I do not go lightly onto it. I shall go noisily, with words and pictures. I will not say goodbye. I will not make you a ghost just yet. Instead, I will continue to post these little ramblings to you. Even without your responses, I hear you quite clearly in my head. Where ever you are, B.J., you go with my love.

ALWAYS & FOREVER,  
 ME



B.J. Forever  
 51 Storyland Road  
 Wood Haven, MD 321028

Stamp Art by Ken Smith



Postcards from the Penitentiary by L.S. King | lakingsphotography.com