

# Writing through a pandemic

## Seven Seattle women reflect on a pandemic-era writers' group

Seven Seattle writers reflect on the evolving condition of these past two years, penning it all down in "Writing While Masked." Pre-pandemic, Mary Ann Gonzales, Tyson Greer, Wanda Herndon, Laura Delise Lippman, Jane Spalding, Suzanne Tedesko and Beth Weir met weekly over a cup of coffee to discuss their previous week's writing. All seven women had retired from professional careers, and this group was a way for them to socialize while pursuing new ambitions.

But the pandemic shut the door on their customary meetings. While they found a way to continue via Zoom, it simply didn't have all the qualities of in-person gatherings, but it did keep them trafficking in ideas and self-expression. "When a plague swept through London in 1606 and theaters closed, Shakespeare locked down and penned 'King Lear,' 'Macbeth' and 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" Greer wrote.

But this wasn't just a pandemic. The events of 2020 continued to pile one on top of another – shelter-in-place was followed by the killing of George Floyd and a nationwide reckoning with systemic racism, followed by the apocalyptic skies of summer wildfires and a high-stakes presidential election. There was plenty of material to work with. These writers were engaged in current events and frequently commented on the issues of the day, but their primary focus seemed to be on what was happening within their personal sphere – and what wasn't happening.

Gone were the weekly extended family gatherings around the dining room table. Gone were the theater outings and travel plans to far-flung places. So instead they wrote about sewing masks, baking sourdough bread, planting vegetable gardens and learning ukulele. They were grateful, in a begrudging kind of way, that at least they could Zoom with the grandkids. Attending memorial services via Zoom? Not so much.

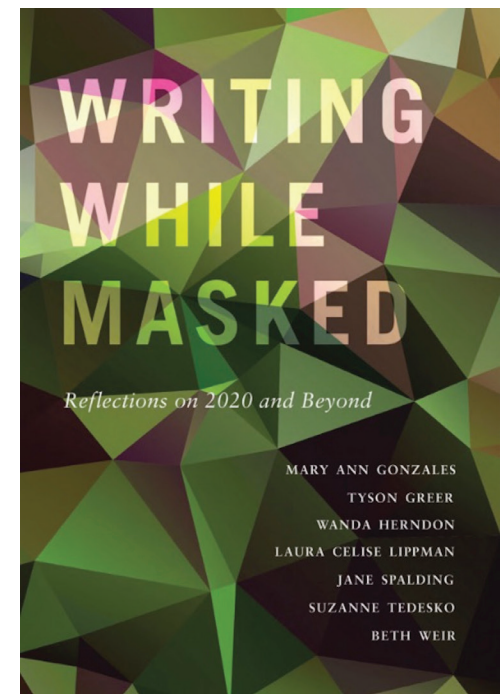
As a collection of essays and poems, these reflections capture a momentous time

in history as seen through a specific lens: female elders, politically progressive, fairly comfortable in retirement. The observations are valuable, but they represent only a slice of the population. While these writers certainly contended with social isolation and other limitations brought on by the pandemic, they were able to avoid some of the truly dire conditions faced by others during this time.

Nevertheless, these women did dedicate themselves faithfully to the practice of recording the realities they faced. Ultimately, Greer noted, "Neither I nor anyone in our writing group will claim accomplishments of Shakespeare's measure, but we did write... and write... and write."

"Writing While Masked" sends a valuable message to the future: We were here. We experienced this. We were resilient.

*The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [barbaralmcm@gmail.com](mailto:barbaralmcm@gmail.com).*



### This week's book

'Writing While Masked: Reflections on 2020 and Beyond'

Basalt Books – 208 pp — \$18.95

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