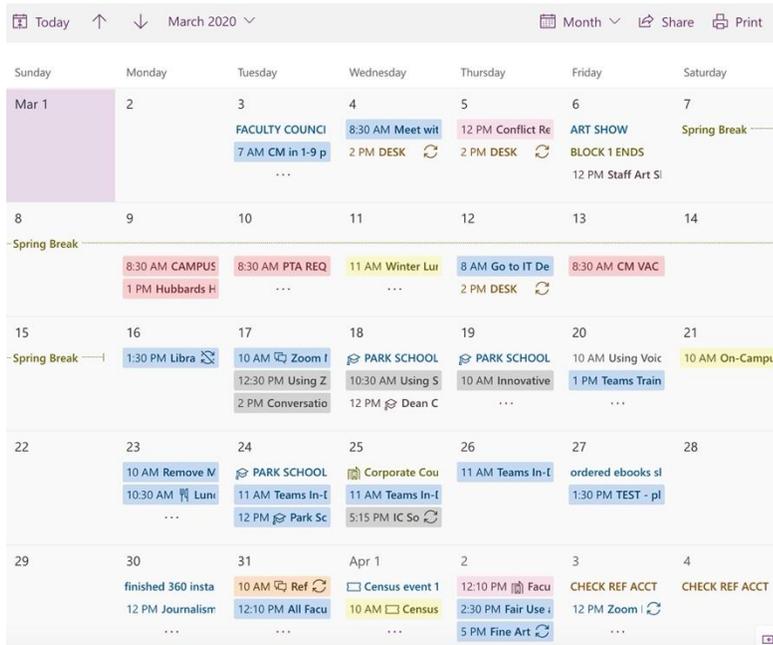


Name: Catherine Michael, Communications Librarian

Date: 4/9/2021

Title: Living (with cats) and Working through the Pandemic

**March 2020.** When I consider hallmark events around the time that COVID-19 struck, I recall a CFE workshop, the Staff Council Art Exhibit, a Moog Celebration at Cornell and our last Library Staff Meeting in particular. It was over a year ago now. In early March, I attended a workshop with Sue Je Gage in the Center for Faculty Excellence. She later died on May 10th, a death that compounded the anxiety and sadness of the pandemic. Friday, March 6th was the opening of the Staff Council Art Exhibit in the Campus Center. Arranged by Sarah Shank and Sarah Jacobs. Some of the works are posted in a Digital Commons exhibit. I entered a painting of my cat James Madison who died in October 2012 after having cancer. When I first came to Ithaca College in 2005, I bought my first home on First & Madison Street in the Northside. I grew up with dogs but decided to adopt two cats from the Tompkins County SPCA. I named them Dolley and James



Madison as I lived on Madison Street. The evening of March 5th, I went to Cornell University for an event celebrating the, "Life and Legacy of Robert Moog" with my partner Robert, a lecturer at Ithaca College. We moved to Trumansburg in 2015, and, in 2016 the Village erected a sign in commemoration of Moog's invention and production of the synthesizer which changed music history. I had heard some news about the virus but things had not yet shut down. I was in the auditorium amidst the crowd, and a student behind me dropped her phone and it slid under my chair. I recall being nervous to pick it up due to germs. Robert actually social distanced & did not sit beside me but further up to the front left. Before Covid-19, we were both germ-aware

-- I swabbed the Research Help Desk before my shift each day and used a paper towel to open doors. We decided not to return to Cornell for the library's opening night of the exhibit in the Rare Books and Manuscript section. If I remember, right, following the Moog event, Cornell decided to cancel all public events which was a clue to the severity of the virus.

### Spring Break

Following Spring Break I was planning to visit a series of biology classes. When it was announced Spring Break was extended for a week, I created an online tutorial "Biodiversity Project: Literature Searching". I can't recall the exact date it was announced that we would be virtual for the remainder of the Spring. I recall deciding that I planned to work virtually from home and that I drew up a work-from-home plan. There was a library meeting on the Monday following Spring Break. I normally take the bus but I drove in as it seemed safer. I took my plants home and just a few items from my desk. Over Spring Break I brought my two cats, Dolley and Jerry, to the vet. Dolley was suffering diarrhea and losing weight; she had a cancerous tumor removed in 2017 and rebounded for three years. Jerry was thirsty all the time and was diagnosed with kidney disease. We treated Dolley with steroids squirted into her mouth. For Jerry, I had powder called Phos Bind that I'd mix in with his food. Jerry crossed the rainbow bridge on April 9th<sup>th</sup>. Dolley followed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July. Through the stress of changing to working from home, and adapting to the new reality, I was caring for two beloved pets at the end of their lives. Even though



they often hid and rested during the day, I was glad to be home with them during this period. The week after Spring Break faculty were planning to teach online. There were questions about how I made the video (I used Snagit). A wave of questions about textbook access came in from faculty and students. The students did not bring all their belongings home Spring Break week as they didn't know they weren't coming back again; a number of them left their textbooks in their dorms as well. Sympathetic publishers provided some access gratis given the pandemic. The Internet Archive provided an Emergency Library for free. Lis Chabot had librarians alert faculty of what course materials were held by the library. Once the campus and physical library closed, we worked a lot with faculty on obtaining online course materials. I recall going to the *Keep Teaching Sakai* site and posting updates from publishers. Dan Taylor trained us in MS Teams to keep in touch and communicate – I've enjoyed using Teams to call colleagues & chat. Dan created a Break Room where we could post photos, humor, and more break room talk. As we were working in Teams, it was recommended that I start using MS Outlook & Word instead of Gmail & Google Docs; I had to update my home computer to MS 360. Before I did so, I uploaded all of my photographs to a personal MS 360 account which I established; all that data took up a lot of bandwidth & my computer was slow for a couple of days. I kept recording videos for courses and attending Zoom and Team meetings. My recordings had a strange effect that sounded like an old movie reel –that flickering sound. It turned out my home computer's fan likely



needed to be replaced and it was affecting my sound quality. Later, in August, I got permission to return to campus to bring my desktop computer home. After getting permission to visit campus briefly, I used a large piece of luggage on rollers & drove to campus with Robert; he arranged to borrow a camera for his home computer for use teaching in the Fall & I picked up my desktop Mac. Administration posted a call for early retirements or volunteer salary reductions. After deliberation, I agreed to volunteer to take an unpaid leave for the month of July. Judith Andrew & John Birk decided to retire. Pam Ameigh, with whom I rode the 7 am bus in the morning, was furloughed. Later, Yue Hao was let go. Our staff, along with other departments across campus, was reduced over the course of the pandemic. One final project I recall working on at the end of the Spring semester was recording a presentation as part of the Longview Lecture Series. I had originally planned to do an in person presentation but worked on a digital one instead. I completed that and posted it to Kaltura; it was called, "Thinking Critically about Information." Figuring out how to read my presentation notes and move the slides while recording was a challenge. At first I tried Kaltura Capture but had issues with the screen recording (it put me in the picture). I finally returned to Snagit. Before my summer break I completed a film review for EMRO on the artist *Ursula Von Rydingsvard*; I would finish one in the fall, a bit tardy, on the documentary *Shores of Light*. George Floyd's brutal murder on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 began a new Civil Rights movement lead by Black Lives Matter. There were protests across the country and in the City of Ithaca. Having read Dr. Kendi's book on *How to Be an Antiracist* in the Spring, I knew that we would need to change policies to make America more equal. I did not attend the protests for fear of the virus but admired all who did so. I also remember Breonna Taylor who was murdered by officers on March 13, 2020 when they stormed into her apartment while she slept. There are too many names to remember. I have trouble recalling them all; I wrote down the name of Elijah McClain, a gentle spirit killed by police on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to remember.

## Summer 2020



While I was off in July, I had a lot of goals: paint my front porch, glaze my storm windows, write a poem, write scholarly article (something on Rod Serling & aliens, a pop culture piece) – and adopt a cat. Dolley was mainly hiding in the closet but still came out. We had to coax her to eat. I finished the porch project but not the windows (maybe this summer). I outlined the article and began some research but never got to the writing phase. It was difficult to find a kitties to adopt as there seemed to be an adoption surge with everyone working from home. I adopted Virginia (Ginny) and Winston from CNY Snap in Cortland; I applied just for Winston as Ginny was taken; I got an email that the person changed their mind & asking if I could take her too. I took her too, and she is as sweet as Dolley. They met Dolley once before her euthanasia. Dolley was scheduled to meet Dr. A--, her doctor of 15 years, on a Tuesday night. It was a Saturday morning and she wasn't eating. The practice in Ithaca was opened until noon. I had to make the decision and decided to bring her in on Saturday instead; another doctor in the practice put her to sleep. It didn't go as smoothly as Jerry's death, it that

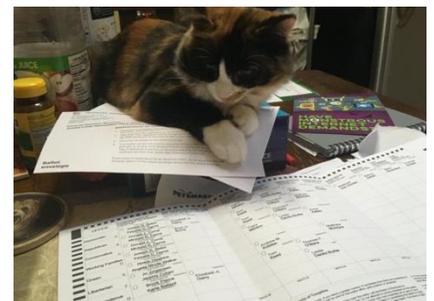
troubled me, and troubles me still. July flew by. August I was back to work. I tried to catch up with the Summer Institute by browsing the Sakai page & watching some of the videos. As mentioned, I had permission to bring my work computer home. One faculty used iMovie to record is polished videos. I always recorded my videos as an unpolished one shot as I had no editing skills. So, I took a LinkedIn Learning course and applied my new found editing skills on a welcome back video for RA Orientation. I ultimately decided that I was not pleased with it so created a Snagit at the last minute. In the video I emphasized the *Keep Teaching & Keep Learning* links on the library's website – that was removed a week later! Everything seemed in flux. We had a curbside pick-up service & now could digitize media. The campus was planning on welcoming students back so we even had a date that the library would open. Then, President Collado, concerned with the state of the pandemic, decided that Fall 2020 would be all virtual (there were a few exceptions). Librarians shifted from planning in person work to working from home. We had a little bit of grant money to spend on books, taught online, and created canned videos for asynchronous learning. Redesigning classes took some time. We also decided to pilot an all library staff Chat service and booked everyone in When to Work software. This worked wonderfully, thanks to staff from other areas helping us cover. It seemed like a good portion of questions at the time were about Access Services: the digitization of materials & curbside pickup.

## Fall 2020



Traffic (questions, classes) was a bit less than normal but fairly normal. The kittens became ill with a respiratory infection and I brought them to Colonial Veterinary on East Hill for emergency care. It took a while, and some medication for Ginny, but they eventually got better. The kittens brought me great joy after the loss of Dolley and Jerry. For Banned Books Week in September I advertised an event between Ithaca City of Asylum and Ithaca's Amnesty International chapter & attended myself; it was called, "Crossing the Line about Cartooning, Free Expression, and Censorship" featuring Pedro X. Molina of Nicaragua and Rob Rogers of Pittsburgh. While I advertised it in Engage, our student organization platform, I'm not sure if students attended as I was not the host. For Constitution Day, I advertised events from the National Constitution Center. I attended an presentation with Justice Neil M. Gorsuch and a celebration of Justice Ginsburg in the evening. The announcement of Justice Ginsburg's death on September 18, 2020 was devastating news. I haven't mentioned the political culture of 2020 but I loathed President Trump for all his lies, crimes and cruel policies. He was impeached in January and I thought

the Senate should have convicted him. I was glued to the evening news and watched no situation comedies or dramas. Before work I'd listen to NPR morning edition; after work it was MSNBC; during work I'd periodically check Twitter. At the request of the IC Votes committee, I modified my Political Communication guide to an IC Votes guide. I was asked to add resources about misinformation and elections which I gladly did. The past year proved that American citizens were consuming mis and disinformation and that could affect the Fall election – and about COVID-19 policy, too (such as masks). The pandemic allowed me to request a paper ballot and in 2020 I voted in the primaries and in the general election. While I was thrilled that Joe Biden won, President Trump's Big Lie about a stolen election would give way to the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection and a wave of state level legislation that would restrict voting rights. In addition to the election, Jim Bondra and I were on a campus Census committee to encourage students to understand and fill out the Census. The Committee began in Spring 2020; we were to table in the Campus Center before going virtual. Our contribution was a Library Guide of information about the Census and its process. In the fall, there were some updates. The 2020 Census and the Presidential election were two areas of civic engagement that were part of my memory of pandemic life.



## Spring 2021

President Trump was impeached a second time on January 13, 2021 for inciting an insurrection. The Senate should have convicted him, again. Rep. Jamie Raskin of MD did a fantastic job as the lead impeachment manager. Raskin's dear son Tomas passed away from suicide right before the trial. I recall having trouble focusing on work the afternoon of the Capitol Insurrection on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the event that led to the impeachment. That day, Res Life was doing a presentation at 3 pm online and I was having trouble accessing the event. I recall posting a note that the Capitol was under attack to our Teams page. From Res Life, there were requests to assist with move in and I volunteered for two shifts. This entailed going to campus for a saliva test. Later, as a backup for our Circulation Desk (should someone be quarantined), I began getting tested on alternate Mondays at the Cayuga Medical Center. There is a trailer seated behind the CMC that you drive up to; they don't do the saliva test there but a nasal swab – it is really quick and easy. One Monday, as it was a cold winter, my car didn't start so Robert drove me to the testing center. I would book the test the Wednesday before by going to [apps.ithaca.edu](https://apps.ithaca.edu) > IC Workflow and then COVID-19 Testing Signup. While CMC is a closer drive than the IC campus, I still allotted an hour to get the car started, drive there and back. The first time I went I actually entered the trailer on a cold day; subsequently, I would just drive up to a window in my car, answer some questions, and then drive to a second window where the test was administered. News about the vaccine was prominent. HR sent me a letter stating I was eligible. I registered myself and Robert on the Tompkins County Registry. Robert got an appointment before me and he is at greater risk. My opportunity came a week later on Friday, March 26<sup>th</sup>. I left at 3 pm for a 3:40 pm appointment up at the old SEARS at the mall. When we got there, there was a line that stretched outside from the front of SEARS almost to the front of Best Buy. There were high winds and apparently they lost power earlier in the day. The majority of those in line were Cornell students. I presume not enough people in Registration groups 1a or 1b signed up and so the County opened it up to Cornell. I chatted with a law student from California who misjudged the weather and was shivering in shorts. A biology undergraduate was right ahead of me. By the time I was allowed to go it was 5:40 pm. Despite the two hour process, I'm just glad they allowed all of us who registered to get vaccinated. As I write this, I await my second shot on April 21<sup>st</sup>. It was announced this week that everyone should be vaccinated by Fall 2021. At work, I did some instruction, less than usual, chat reference, and meetings. Highlights of the Spring may be reading Stacey Abrams's book *Lead from the Outside* with the Park Scholars and working with IC alumna & Syracuse iSchool student Claire Pitcairn on her project; she suggested more de-stress programs for our library. It is my last semester serving on Faculty Council and a difficult time to do so through the downsizing of staff and faculty, yet another source of stress. The decisions through the final *Shape of the College* plan were on everyone's mind and even in national higher education news. In the second block of the Spring semester, I signed up for Diana's meditation class to help with anxiety and focus; I've attended two classes at the time of this writing and am trying to start a habit; we are to keep a log. While the longer and warmer days and the vaccines are signs of hope, the loss of so many members of our community has been difficult. I worked with the Digital Commons Team, especially Bridget and Abby, on establishing the COVID-19 Archive. I am likely leaving out a lot, and realize this is a mish-mash of memories, but I hope this remembrance may interest those who want to know what life was like at a college during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. For me, working during the pandemic included the context of politics, the economy, the campus and my home life, all of which had their own pressures and exerted force on my attention, happiness, and sense of safety. As an introvert and a homebody, I didn't mind working from home, but it is harder to feel a part of student and campus life so I look forward to returning.

