

All is Lost  
by Tom Kimball  
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This is our time of suffering, of social distancing, apprehension, and fear. It is also a time of surrendering traditions, and memories, and things that we can *never* get back. Few will understand our sacrifice, our dreams, our loss. I truly wonder how anyone does this thing.

It was only supposed to be spring break. How did I know when I walked to my car that I would never walk the halls of Lakeland as a student again, or slip past Mr. Terry's office for a chat, or get a chin lift from that tall kid who plays basketball? Weeks earlier, Dr. Hiner and I entered a back door to Breakers to pick up refreshments for a Phi Theta Kappa gathering, and I would learn one more hallway of Lakeland. Now, I am not sure if I will ever again buy a salad from Breakers and sit in front of those large southern windows, sipping coffee, and flipping through Facebook on my phone. I was supposed to walk May 9 for graduation. My biggest concern for Spring semester was holding onto my 4.00 GPA. Now, I may not even see the robes, the cords, the stole. I was about to order a cap topper that reads, "Don't tell me the odds!"

May was to be my hour of revelry, something to show that this blue-collar kid from the west-side of Salt Lake deserved to be in college. That I was smart enough. That I could make the sacrifice. That I could write. May was to celebrate moving to the Ohio, a home I wasn't raised in, a new hope for me after supporting an ex-wife through graduate school and three kids through college. This was my turn. On a late spring morning in May, I would stand next to hard-won friends and mentors and hold up a few shards salvaged from my self-esteem. COVID-19 stole this from me.

My spouse and I will note our second anniversary at the end of April. We married the same month I began attending classes at Lakeland. She teaches resource and second grade at an Elementary school. When Governor DeWine began closing Ohio schools to slow the spread of the pandemic, Monday March 16 was to be her last day of the school year. Students came to the school sick that day, infecting teachers including my spouse.

Three days later, on the advice of our insurance provider, I drove my spouse to the emergency room because her upper chest was hurting, and she was running a fever. They ran tests including a test for the virus. They told us results would take a few days. She came home that night. The following Monday, the day before my birthday, I began to run a temperature of 101 and became achy. Two days later I drove my spouse back to the ER, and this time they kept her overnight in concern for her oxygen levels. Still, after six days out from the original virus test there was no official word if she was infected, so they took another sample. The hospital would not test me.

My spouse overheard doctors saying they wanted her out of the hospital because she might infect the staff. My spouse came home and struggled for several days. The test would eventually come back positive. I began to have a hard time sleeping, and at six thirty in the morning, after only a couple hours of sleep, my spouse's son knocked on my door saying that my spouse was asking for help. Feeling miserable, I quickly dressed and as I approached my spouse, her phone rang. I talked to an attending nurse from the hospital. In my fog, we briefly discussed my spouse's situation and what to do. I began thinking out-loud expressing concern

that these trips to the ER would put us in a poor house. The nurse called back moments later and advised me to take my spouse back to the ER. When we arrived, they told me I could not follow her. I drove to a corner of the parking lot and slept in my car for a few hours waiting for someone to let me know what was going on. My phone never rang, so I drove home and slept. As of that morning, I began to have symptoms again. My temperature went up, I felt terrible, I was disoriented, food began tasting bad, and I was dropping weight.

After an extended spring break, classes at Lakeland transitioned to on-line courses. My last semester was the heaviest load of my school career. I did not need all these classes to graduate, but I wanted to take these courses, and my Pell Grant covered the expense. I was doing well in three subjects but struggling to keep my grades in History. Before the break, I knew I would have to claw my way back into an A. In the weeks since the semester began, I built a routine, a system, and study groups. My professors were challenging and interesting and I had this. Now, everything was different. At some point, my anxiety began to peak as notices from Blackboard blew up my phone unfolding new dynamics of each class. Each course became one more level difficult. In-class projects weighted toward my strengths transitioned into difficult tests. Pre-test overviews for in-class tests were replaced with timed on-line tests with no lecture, overview, or guidance. Study groups were gone. Loose contacts gone. Routine, gone. Everything was harder and I considered dropping a class to adjust my workload. Saying I am overwhelmed does not give this thing justice. A nag that I push to the outer edges of my head began talking again. It says, Tom is too old to go to school. Tom has no business being here. Tom began to feel fear.

My spouse texted me from the hospital that she would be divorcing me. She said that as she lay dying, I mused about finances and then drove her to the ER instead of calling for an ambulance. This showed I did not value her life. I don't have an answer for her. I was doing my best, which was my worst.

Tom still has tests, papers to write, and four more weeks of school so that this summer, while wearing jeans and a t-shirt, he can sit alone in his room, in tears, holding a piece of paper in the air, telling himself that he earned some great thing.

--Tom Kimball is a full-time student at Lakeland Community College, and contributing editor for the *Lakelander* magazine. He is a former publicist for Signature Books based in Salt Lake City, former Head Cashier at the Mentor Barnes & Noble, and a twenty-five-year career bookseller. He will transfer to Cleveland State in the fall of 2020 to study History.