

A CALL FOR A NEW FEDERAL THEATRE
PROJECT: A SENIOR CAPSTONE

A Living Newspaper Project

“when a crisis hits home”

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*This is for all the young people
growing up amidst COVID-19
who need a home.*

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Notes from the Team

***Shelter is not a human right in the U.S.
It is a human right almost everywhere else.
Why is that? And what is the impact of that?***

Through this project for our theatre capstone, inspired by Living Newspapers like *One Third of a Nation*, we wanted to talk to AU students and alumni to explore how the nation has failed the people who are about to become the nation and how young people can be impacted by housing and eviction. As AU students ourselves, our relationship with our sources and our audiences are honed in on the community that we care about. It doesn't feel distant. It feels close, tangible, and real to us. It feels like the crisis hits home. We are exploring a microcosm of the housing/eviction crisis within our community: within a campus that is still our home online, and within a city that we've lived in for the past four years. **And no one else will tell the stories of students and alumni fully, carefully, and accurately, besides students.**

We wanted to move our audiences to action because everyone deserves the basic human right to shelter, by uncovering why we are like this and allowing audiences to empathize with stories of those who were denied housing or who have housing-related struggles, whether audiences have ever been in these people's shoes or not. We also want to give people in the DMV/AU area solutions, because we can't leave our sources in the dark feeling awful about their situation. We asked about local assistance and how people who experienced housing issues found help, and provided resources and links to groups for housing support and COVID-19 pandemic relief assistance as ways to help in the end of this virtual monologue PDF book.

Looking back on the work we did, I know that this is literally just the beginning, just our local community, and there are still many people in this country facing evictions in the new year. **It remains essential that their voices are heard and people are aware of the crisis.** Thinking ahead to what's possible in 2021, I have cautious hope of a better tomorrow for all those who need a home and comfort in these dark times.

-Daniella Ignacio

What does it mean to have a home?

It's already difficult enough to define home in college. Is it where you were born? In the places you grew up? Where you're going to school? As the pandemic rages on, more and more young people find themselves without stable, adequate, and affordable housing. If you've been lucky enough to never have to worry about the roof over your head, housing insecurity can feel like a faraway thing. But for the students actually living it? It's scary and isolating and shameful. In the Federal Theatre Project's original Living Newspaper plays, the intent was to take the words of actual people, put them on stage for an audience, and by doing so, give voice to the voiceless. When taking on this project, that is exactly what we wanted to do. Shame silences people so often, but where has shame ever gotten us? What progress has shame ever brought about? By telling these stories, we want to push for a change this country so desperately needs.

Everyone deserves a home. We hope you think so too.

-Sultana Qureshi

Notes from the Team (con't.)

What is “The American Dream” during a pandemic?

“The American Dream,” or the mythologized idea of the American Dream, was central to the investigative process of our project. Being college students ourselves only months away from graduating, we wanted to know who else in our community had questions regarding their security and prospects of success. Though our sources are in different places, are studying different things, and have different experiences, we’ve found that there are many of us right now feeling unsupported due to broken promises.

We wanted to use this project to give space and a voice to those in our community who feel unheard, and encourage action from all of us.

It’s time to keep ourselves and those around us accountable.

-Edmée Marie Faal

PART ONE:

We Live Here Now

“All Because of This Stupid Apartment”

ANONYMOUS:

So – here, wait, give me one second. (*Opens the door.*) Hi, Mom. I’m in an interview, I’m in an interview, I’m in an interview right now.

(*Turns back to Zoom screen.*) I went to Atlanta to visit family during spring break. And then there I found out about COVID. And I was just upset that I couldn’t go home, that was it, I just really wanted to go home for spring break. But they were like, “We should go to Atlanta and not Miami.” I was like, “Sure, that’s fine.” And my aunt and everyone in my family. They’re all doctors. And they were like, “Oh, this is gonna last a year. It’s gonna last a year.” So I threw a tantrum – I was so upset, like, “No, you’re lying. That’s not true.”

I was supposed to have a show in D.C. the whole summer. So I was anticipating going back, I kept – I had an apartment in D.C. I was like, Okay, I’ll keep my apartment there. And I’ll be back in May, this will be over, I’ll just be back. And I was planning to go abroad in the fall, like, I’ll go abroad in the fall and everything will be fine. My lease ends in August. And, of course, none of that happened. So I was like, I’ll go abroad later, I don’t get to go abroad with my friends, but I’m lucky enough to go abroad. And then, um, show was canceled...and then, was postponed. Um, and then I was like, okay, maybe we’ll go back in fall. And maybe that’ll happen.

And then I ended up – I had two jobs while I was in D.C., I had two jobs to pay for rent. And I lost both of those jobs. And my apartment is terrible. I was fighting with the building for about five months just to get a payment plan, just to figure out how I’m even going to pay for this, and then what ended up happening is, I was like oh, maybe I should have someone sublet, or someone take over my lease. And then I found out that’s not actually allowed, then I have to pay for three more months of rent, even though I wasn’t there, just because they couldn’t tell me that wasn’t allowed, that I wasn’t allowed to have someone take over my lease month to month. And then all the people I was speaking to in the building got fired. And no one told me they got fired - so all my points of references were fired. I would call, like, “Hey, where’s this person?” “Oh, they don’t work for us anymore.” Excuse me? A month later, I finally have a new person to talk to – fired, and talked to them. Oh, yeah, I’m friends, I’m friends with the people on the front desk. And they told me, they’re like, “Oh, Halston doesn’t work here anymore.” Like, what do you mean Halston’s not here anymore? I’ve been emailing Halston for two months!

Then, I owe thousands of dollars. Don’t know how I’m gonna pay for it, don’t have a job. And all because they couldn’t tell me that, you know, I would have ended my lease months ago, I would have ended it in the middle of summer if I had known. I probably could afford to go back to school and I almost couldn’t afford to this semester – I’m taking out so many loans. All because of this stupid apartment.

And it’s really sad because it’s one of the cheaper options, you know, D.C. is not cheap at all. It’s one of the cheaper options but it’s not worth it. Like, I had someone, like threaten my neighbor that he was gonna kill them, beat on their door. So I’m glad to be out of that building. Yeah, 0/10.

“I Didn’t Have A Backup For The Backup”

PATRICK:

I was living on campus and had secured a job with Conference and Guest Services for the summer. So, my expectation was that I was going to be working two jobs with free housing. But I was notified in, I think, late March. No...Yes, late March, early April, somewhere around there, that I would no longer be working for the university in any capacity because of COVID. So, I was kicked out of housing and I lost two jobs, and I had like, each job was sort of a backup plan for the other. So I didn’t have a backup for the backup. Guess it’s my fault, right?

But in March, I interviewed for a Resident Assistant position and I was notified in the summer that we’d be going back to campus and they were looking for RAs that were put on the waiting list after the job interviews, and I was one of those RAs. So I was going to be a RA, which I was so excited for, because that’s free housing, that’s a stipend, and then with my other job, I’d be making enough to save up and start paying more into tuition. But then, all of a sudden, we were told to meet in early August and so, kind of late notice, I was planning on living and was already looking for things to buy for the room I was going to live in. And they were like “Hey yeah, sorry guys, you don’t have a job anymore, uh, see you later!” And that was pretty much the entirety of that conversation with the RA department.

But I don’t like to look at it like...I no longer have a job as an RA. I don’t look at it like it’s AU’s fault, um...they made the right decision. But I can’t be at home, and it’s not like I don’t like being home! It’s just we don’t have Internet. We literally do not have Internet. And so, if I had an online class, I just would not be able to do that at home.

I think I knew since March, not so deep down, that this would be a thing. And that this would happen. I knew that when AU sent their “hybrid classes” announcement email, there was no chance that we were actually going back in person at all, because, you know, everything was getting worse. You could see it getting worse. Students shouldn’t be going back to campus, we’re still in a pandemic. They made the right decision. But the consequences of that decision, I...didn’t particularly like.

“Thanks, I’m Not Gonna Sleep On The Street”

MOLLY:

I had two jobs when COVID began. I worked at the Kennedy Center as an unpaid intern, and then I also worked as a performer for a Disney Princess party company. Um, and I watched a dog every day. But when COVID hit, I lost all of that work and I could not afford rent in the upcoming months. So, I actually took out an emergency loan for about \$2,000 in order to cover the next two months’ rent.

After spring break, after I’d finished paying that month’s rent, I moved back home into my childhood home with my family, where I could live rent-free. And that was – moving back in was – quite a bit...Like, my brother’s significant other moved in with us because she didn’t have a place to go. And my boyfriend also moved in with us. So suddenly I went from being a household of three people to a household of seven, which was a lot and doing all of our classes online. And so I was still actually paying rent in my D.C. apartment for a while, not living there which was – so I had to work 45 to 50 hours a week.

I’m trying to figure out whether or not I’m going to be moving back to D.C., trying to find work there, if there’s any work there, or trying to sublet that again for the spring. But honestly, finding a sub-letter was just incredibly difficult. I mean, every, every social media outlet was swamped with people just outpouring, like “I’m moving home, I’m moving home, can someone please take my spot.” Um, and I still know people who to this day, are still looking for people to take their place in this sublet.

A lot of hard conversations were had in our house, um, with all of us, just trying to figure out who could do what, who had enough money to make it, paying, you know, utilities and stuff like that. Every dollar was very strained for a lot of us. And so then having it be like...hearing things during COVID, like, oh, the government’s gonna allow you to not be evicted. I was like, “Oh, thanks.” That’s the bare minimum that any person could do. Not getting evicted. Yeah, I still have to pay all this money, but they’re not gonna evict me. Thanks. That was just definitely one of those things where I felt like it was like, they’re like, “Oh, we’re gifting you this, this wonderful thing, here, here you go. “And we’re like, “Oh, man, thanks. I’m not gonna sleep on the street.”

I’m just asking, like, “Who is this benefiting?” Every person is different and has different needs. And that needs to be recognized. There’s inequality in the system, I think in the government’s eyes, especially. They mean, they think of inequality in the sense that “Alright, we’ll give everyone who’s, who meets these randomized standards, this arbitrary thing, we’ll give it all the same amount and everyone’s, everyone’s equal.” Like, no, that’s not equality at all. Everyone needs their own things.

“Seven Roommates, Three Rooms, One Quarantine”

JULIA:

I had originally been planning on signing a lease with six roommates, so there'd be seven of us total. And basically, what happened was, when everything shut down, the landlord was pretty much like, “It's now or never, sign the lease or don't.” And so we signed it, because we assumed we'd be coming back next semester. In March, it didn't really seem that crazy to think that we would be back by August. So, I signed on to live with six other people in March without knowing that it would mean seven people in a three-bedroom apartment all the time, 24/7, taking online classes together.

I hadn't planned on staying here this summer, but when COVID happened, there were less opportunities for me at home. So I stayed, because I was paying the rent anyway. But at this point, I still don't think I would have signed the lease if I had known I would be with just these people, all the time. When we found out we were going fully online, it was just... this kind of like, “Well, what do we do now?” I mean, most people in the apartment didn't have a desk. We were just like, “What are we going to do? How are we going to set up boundaries?” Like, when can you take class in the living room? When can you be like, near the kitchen? We all need to find time to eat, but you also don't want to walk across the back of someone's Zoom or be distracting. Like, vacuuming is a big thing. You know, finding time to vacuum.

I think that, for me, just being in such close quarters with other people all the time and feeling like I have no sense of privacy, especially when I'm taking classes, has really affected my mental health, I would say. I had to go home a month ago, I think, because I had to go somewhere. When you live with so many people in such close quarters, it's like, if one person is sad, everyone is sad. And if one person is happy, then it's like this really infectious thing. You're just...always together.

“It Really Ran Me Over Like A Bus”

ANONYMOUS:

So.

Hm.

So.

When coronavirus happened and hit, it hit – it really ran me over like a bus. Because of it, I had to go home, and home...isn't the best place for me. I went from being an RA on campus, which was a job I really loved, to going home and being surrounded by people that um, aren't super good for me. And I thought that would be the only change. A few things happened in my household, and long story short, I – uh, I was kicked out. I was asked to find somewhere else to live. So, um, I've spent a few nights since March and being kicked out, on like my friend's couches. And so, since the pandemic began, school has been my only support. And I think that speaks volumes, because even though emergency housing was tricky to get and to apply for, but...If I didn't have emergency housing, I don't know where I'd be. And I'm not just saying that. I genuinely don't know where I would be. I can't be at home, because I'm not physically allowed to be there. And so, I...the school provided for me when I felt like no one else could. Or would.

But I haven't acclimated well to this space. There's still nothing on the walls. And I think...a reason as to why I didn't make the space my own is because of the fact that like, some part of me was hoping that things would work out, I would kind of...hold on to hope. I think of myself as a pretty hopeful person. And that's one thing I used to love about myself. But I don't have a home. Because what I thought was my home didn't end up being my home.

And so I don't want this to feel like home. Because...I feel like...I feel like I shouldn't have to. But recently I've been starting to come to terms with the fact that this is very much the only place that I have. And though some people who I've talked to about what happened, they always say, "Oh, you can stay with me!" Like, I'm not going to do that. Because that's their home, you know?

[Pause. They indicate something behind them.]

I stole this TV, this *[they make a gesture with their hands to indicate the size of the TV]* TV, it's pretty decent! I took it before I left from home, I very much just took things. I was like, what are they gonna do with it? That and also, why do they deserve it? And so I just took random things. The only thing in my life that was giving me any happiness was the fact that when I plugged in the TV, after two months of having nothing on the walls or nothing plugged in or nothing ready, um, the first thing I plugged in was this TV. And to my surprise, a dog slideshow appeared. And I just...never turned it off. I would sleep with the dog slideshow playing. I eventually figured out how to get Netflix to work, but it's fully the only thing that was giving me happiness in my life...

PART TWO:

Beyond Housing

“Living With A Disability Is Really Isolating In Itself”

HANNAH:

This story starts off around spring break. I was living in this shared bedroom with a girl. And she decided to travel to France during the beginning of the pandemic. I didn't really want to say anything, because I didn't really know, fully, like what was happening with COVID at the time, I was already a little bit concerned, just because I'm, like, from what I had been reading about COVID like, it sounded pretty serious. I started to express that to some of my friends, but I...was telling them "Oh, like, I'm concerned," and the response would pretty much unanimously be, "Oh, well, you shouldn't be that worried. We're young, like, it doesn't really affect us." And I think some of them would forget, you know, that, like, I am a person with an autoimmune disorder...I think living with a disability is already isolating in itself...And it was clear that other people were not understanding of how the immunocompromised community was affected by this.

I don't think the girl that I'm sharing the room with was that concerned, even though I had told her about, you know, some of my health issues, and she had a family friend who actually died of the condition that I have. So I thought she would have known, [*Laughs softly*] like, how serious this can be. But that clearly didn't translate. Spring break was the period of time when the government decided maybe we should start shutting down borders so then she got in a little bit of a panic of "Oh my gosh, I need to leave Europe. Like, if I stay here any longer I don't know if I'm going to be able to get back." And so I was texting her throughout this, like kind of internally freaking out. Like, oh my god, she's gonna bring something back. So I'm texting her saying like, "Oh, like, what are your plans for, you know, coming back to D.C., like, do you think you're going to be back at the house? Like, like, what's going on? Because, you know, a lot of things are changing right now. And I think it would just be good for both of us if we were on the same page," and she wasn't particularly interested in communicating with me.

I guess for me, that was really frustrating because I had wanted to live in my house as a rent-paying member, just like I would have always been. And I felt like very much so discriminated against in that respect, because like, as a person with a disability, like, technically I have to be provided with reasonable accommodations to, like, live in a particular space. And eventually, she came to apologize because I had made the argument that like, I just think it's really selfish to come back to Washington, D.C., return to your normal schoolwork, return to your normal job, when you should be quarantining and not letting your employer know or not letting your friends know that like, you know, you were partaking in this trip. Because, like, you know, you could be encountering so many other people like me, and exposing them.

So, at that point in time, I decided I need to do what's best for me and just leave for the weekend. And we can figure that out, like, when the time comes, but initially, it was like, very difficult to deal with, because I felt like I was being forced to leave my house, my space, to, like, accommodate someone. When in reality, I didn't feel like I was doing anything, like, wrong in a sense. The rest of the roommates...were not really interested in practicing social distancing. And obviously, things were changing at that time. But I feel like, as an equal member of this house, I should be able to live here, I shouldn't have to move out of my house, because you want to see your friends.

“Well, This Only Affects You”

HANNAH:

I returned in August to a new group of housemates, and I think everyone was on the same page too, about, you know, okay, how are we going to deal with coronavirus as a house? We had established some basic house rules, like each person in the house has one or two friends that are allowed to come over, like, pretty much whenever, like no questions asked, they can be here without a mask. But like, outside of that, really no one else should be coming into the house, really at all.

A couple weeks went by, and it became clear that my roommates were no longer interested in practicing these rules. People started having friends over that shouldn't have been in the house, but it was raining, so you know, plans were changed last minute. And now like, “Oh, what am I supposed to do?” You know, that's really tough. Because, like, it sucks when they're basically at your door. And it's really scary, because, like, for me, like the coronavirus is potentially fatal.

So I expressed to them all of those concerns. And I'm telling them like, you know, if this doesn't improve, like, I will have to move out. Like, this is not something that I can really take the risk for, as someone who has been chronically ill for every single day of my life for the past two years, just so that you can go and see friends. Because, like, I understand that you want to have like a senior year in a sense, but, like, I do too, and like for me, like I just want to live. Like to you, you want to go and you want to see people and you want to have fun but like, for me, it's literally like a life or death situation. And the response I got was, “Well, this only affects you.”

I kind of expected a little bit more sympathy or understanding. And that was just pretty devastating to see. Just the, like, I guess, ableism and, like, disrespect. After that, I just felt like, very deeply, like, unheard and like, not understood, and disrespected. It seems like my disability was like too much for them to handle. *(Starts to cry.)* And they... *(Takes a deep breath.)* didn't make an effort to clean anymore. They didn't make an effort to reduce their contact, they didn't get tested. So the things that they had proposed and agreed to, they weren't really willing to follow up on those. Um, and so at that time, it became clear that I needed to move out. *(Sniffs.)*

I started wearing my mask around the house. I had to like quarantine like all of my dishes, all of my silverware, all of my cleaning supplies. *(Sniffs.)* And like, it just became extremely difficult, because there's no way that like, I could completely isolate myself from them or their contact. It was very frustrating, because I should be able to come home and not have to worry, but in reality, the situation made it so that I would come home and that would be the first thing that I think of. “Okay, like, I absolutely need to wear my mask once I step in the door, because I don't know who's inside my home right now.” And there was no real way to tell them, you know, “This is what I need,” because I had already done that two or three times, and nothing ever seemed to get through. *(Sniffs.)*

I decided to go on a run and I get a text from one of my roommates saying that they are going to have out of town friends stay with us soon. And I was like, “Okay, well, I guess I'll move out that weekend, then.” And my roommate responded. *[She pauses, takes out her phone.]* And hold on, I'll read you the message because I don't want to mess things up. The message said, “I'm sorry, but I'm really sick of the passive aggressiveness, we literally had an entire house meeting about communication. And since then, you haven't spoken to really any of us. And I think we can all be mature and adult about this. So if you have a problem, please share, I'd be happy to address any concerns you have.” At this point, I'm fully having a panic attack, as I walk back. And I finally get back up to my room. And at this point in time, I'm like, extremely like, hyperventilating, like I'm starting to lose feeling in my face and my hands and my feet, like all my extremities, just because I'm hyperventilating so much and like, my mind obviously starts racing, my heart starts racing.

...I finally moved out, like all of my things last weekend. So now I'm living with my parents again. But yeah, yeah... Yeah, it's really hard too because, you know, I think the onus is really on the individual to kind of express what they need, but it's hard to when, like, either people don't want to listen, or like aren't willing to put in the effort to actually find a solution that's viable for everyone...

“My Originally Intended Career Is Dead Now”

RACHEL:

My originally intended career, I've been just saying, is dead now. Hopefully it comes back to life. But like, as we know it – I mean, people are adapting in cool ways and especially with stuff like this, but it's less financially viable to be an actor.

This was supposed to be a really good year, actually, I feel like we hyped up 2020 a lot. It like, started strong, I was like, “I'm graduating this year,” I have my shit together. Not completely, but more than I used to! And, I felt like – I don't know. Graduating was confusing when the pandemic was starting, to figure out what emotions were pandemic-based and what emotions were graduating-based, because they both have to do with this fear of the future. But before that, I was fairly excited to graduate and become an adult.

I was working with some non-profit stuff over the summer, but I'm now – it's now getting into the point where I was like in a temporary position, because I thought this would be a temporary living situation. I'm back home now, in California, living with my mom and like, and just super grateful, I guess, that I had a home that was mine to just move back into.

I think for me, I've been rethinking home a lot, because I'm usually not a homebody. I'm very, like, I like to be – I don't spend that much time at home. Usually I'm like, out and about doing things, and home is for like, sleeping and if I need to get food. It's for like getting what I need so that I can go back out into the world. But, obviously, in a pandemic, I've been spending a lot more time at home than usual. And, yeah, it's just been interesting, even my room that I grew up in is not super decorated, because I never spent that much time in it. Now I'm like, oh, there is something to be said for homeyness and for comfort and for making your space your own. I feel like I've gotten more attached to the idea of home.

“How to Out Your Disability via Zoom”

JULIA:

So, I have a disability. I have a hearing loss. And that already puts me at a disadvantage for school, and I think it always has. And it's always been a hurdle that I try to overcome, and I think that going online really exacerbated that. I think that taking online classes and trying to figure out what everyone's saying and keep up with lip-reading while also- and just understanding that Internet is lagging and not everything is going to be keeping up, especially because not all students can have their camera on. But it does become really hard for me sometimes to understand what people are saying. I'm very reliant on lip-reading. That's just another way, too, the pandemic affected me, because, you know, masks. You can't really lip-read, and that's a whole other challenge in itself.

One of the big things is that I've always recorded lectures. I've always had permission to record lectures. Like, when I felt like it was necessary, but now with Zoom, it puts me in such a weird position to have to have everyone in the class sign off with their permission. It almost feels like outing your disability to everyone and that's not always something I feel comfortable doing. Some professors have been really understanding, and acting like they're the ones who want to record it, like, "It'll be up on Canvas for anyone." [*She winks, grinning.*] Like no, I know we had that meeting where you were like, "Okay, I'll record class from now on!" But I really appreciate that, because I feel like it takes the pressure off of me.

But I've always felt like AU has had some equity problems. Since the time I arrived, I noticed that there were a lot of things that were inaccessible to students who, in my own experiences, who might struggle financially. I found from the very beginning that I was like, I didn't realize college was going to be so expensive. Like, I knew it was going to be expensive, but I didn't know that when I got there, that there would be so many professors who would be like, you have to spend money on this, you have to spend money on that, and I didn't know that, and I think that shows that AU has always had an equity issue. I think that shows more than ever when they cancelled – when they basically said, "If you got a lease, like, sorry about it."

Just because 70% or whatever it is, of students can attend without financial aid, doesn't mean that – just because, statistically, the number of less well-off students is smaller, they're not given as much attention. I know for me, I'm at AU on a ton of scholarships and financial aid, and sometimes it can feel really, really isolating, even when we were in session. And I feel like a lot of these inequalities are being exaggerated by COVID-19. And I think that there's sort of this idea that if you're going to this, like, private institution, this prestigious private school, that you have a ton of resources to go there. But it's like, I'm going to this expensive private school because they're the ones who happened to offer me the most financial aid. You know?

“Post-Grad Adult-Child”

CATHERINE:

I've been awarded and revoked six jobs since COVID started. Because as soon as a job was cancelled, I was applying for another one. As soon as that job was cancelled, I was applying for another one. This was something I learned to do at AU, because I was constantly doing a lot of things. It's, it's so interesting, because I get really restless, feeling like I'm not doing anything. And like I, time and time again, remind myself that no one is doing anything. And that there is, there is no normal. We are, we are all searching for a new normal as we move forward.

But the whole like, a wife and two kids and a white picket fence, and a job, like that is so far from the way that America is unfolding in 2020. We are, we are, we are scraping the bottom of the barrel and being like, happy about it. Because the circumstance is so different. And like, right now, I'm just like, I'm envious of those people that are so self-centered that they can just live their lives because I would like to be living mine. But I know what collectivism is, and I care about the people around me and people in general.

If there was space at my house, I'd be back home, but my dad did the thing that a lot of families do. Like all of my sisters, we've all like grown up. So my dad was like, it's time to sell our big childhood house, and I get an apartment, right? A year ago, that totally made sense. We're all basically adults. Now, we don't need the big house. But if, if COVID had happened two years ago, I would have obviously had my childhood home, and I would not be here right now, I'd be, I would have been home with my family the entire time. And I think that's something important to realize, for like people our age that are in this weird adult child thing. There's lots of other people that I know, who have also been like, we just sold our childhood house, and now we're all in this little apartment.

I feel like I'm not as far along as I thought I would be when I was 23, but that comes with doing an extra year of school. I just graduated in May, but I'm a year older than everybody else. So like, my head is with the people I just graduated with. But like, everyone else is like you're almost like 24, and I was like that sounds so weird, 'cause I just finished college. Um, I'm not rushing anything, I guess I've chosen not to grow up for a bit. I've chosen to act like an adult but not grow up. And part of that has been like, indulging in like, hobbies over COVID. Like, I like learned a new instrument and I've been doing more art. Uh, bass! Yeah, I needed to level up. And I think bass was it. And like, those are things that like I kind of left behind for studies. So it kind of brings me back a little bit and it's really nice.

PART THREE:

Give Us A Home

“Don’t Be Afraid To Ask”

CATHERINE:

I was offered an apprenticeship with a theater, and part of the package is housing, but due to COVID, it wasn't safe for me and the other apprentices to move in together. That happened in late August, and I was supposed to move in in September, which forged some difficulties with finding housing in three weeks or less.

I guess don't be afraid to ask, in general, but also in a situation where everyone is kind of suffering in a different way, everyone was affected by COVID in some capacity, so there's a sense of understanding. And also, there's tons of resources out there for housing that I wasn't really aware of, until I was in a situation where I needed to find housing in a pinch. And on social media, as well as just the Internet in itself, as well as like, word of mouth. Um, Facebook groups, there's a group called Housing Boston, also Queer Housing, and there's very, like in the same vein as that there's very specific housing options to make sure people feel safe. If it's like queer or like BIPOC, or low-income. I think Facebook Marketplace and CraigsList are kind of the places to go to for like, quick housing. It was just, it was, it's, it speaks on the community. Like, I remember when I posted in one of the Facebook pages, like a lot of people commented on my posts to boost it so that it was seen by more people. So I could potentially get like a housing thing really quickly. And I think that's really helpful. And also kind of touching, you know, people just genuinely, like, wishing well for other people.

Um, there's lots of, there's lots of interesting housing things all over. Because lots of people work jobs in which they need housing for. And then due to COVID, things like that were cancelled so then there's all this living space that was not being used by a lot of places as well, which is interesting. Like, for example, there, Boston University has a semester abroad in D.C. And so when they sent all their abroad students back, now they have this whole building with all this housing that they weren't using. So a lot of people were trying to see if they could, like, use it for, like, just people that did not have housing that were young professionals in D.C., you know.

Yeah, the apprenticeship...is still happening, which is awesome. We're going to start in January. It is cool. Like, we'll still have half a year. Right now I'm tutoring. And I've been doing some freelance video editing and I assistant directed a show. So just that, not too much. No one's doing too much nowadays. I'm still trying to figure out what exactly I want to do. Yeah, right now, I think I want to be in D.C. for at least a little bit. But we'll also see where opportunities take me – maybe New York, or maybe a farm. It's, it's really one or the other at this point.

“That’s What You Sign Up For”

RACHEL:

The U.S. is a very big place and there are a lot of really big problems, but sometimes, just focusing on a more local level is way more productive than trying to worry about – the fact is, I am, today, not going to be able to solve homelessness in the whole United States, but I can be part of the conversation in my local government. Um, and, California specifically has a huge homeless problem, so just working within the circumstances that we have. There’s a hotel that they’re converting into living space for homeless people in Sacramento, but that’s been a really recent development and it’s something we’ve been fighting for all summer, especially with COVID and how dangerous it is to be unhoused.

Housing should be a human right, and it’s absolutely doable in the sense that, like, the space is there. There is a conversation to be had about what qualifies to be housing and humane housing and you know, moving away from shelters, and if we’re moving away from shelters, then what are we moving away towards? But I personally am fascinated about how this all works on a local level, and how you can work directly with the people that you know, because, I don’t know, a lot of the protests and activism in Sacramento had been happening in the same two or three locations, and in those locations, there’s a pretty big group of people who are unhoused. You see them every weekend, or whatever, and actually working with those people and seeing what they need and setting up programs that are less like shelters and are more forgiving of, you know, drug use or mental health.

I understand it would be naive of me to just say that the government just needs to do the best thing for everyone, and the rest will work out, I understand that today we’re working with a lot of other complexities. But, at the same time, I don’t know. That’s what the job entails. You’re supposed to be the person keeping an eye on those who need you the most and needs someone in their corner the most. That’s what you sign up for.

“Your Students Need Help”

MOLLY:

I live in rural northeastern Vermont and struggle to have Internet connection for classes. If my brother or my sister or anyone really has a class while I have class, I have someone else's house. I've actually gotten a space in a town 20 miles out from here that I go to that's like an office where I have like a little desk that I can do my work at. I pay like \$80 a month for a membership just so I can have like some decent Internet to take my classes.

Finding space where it's quiet because there's always so much going on, someone's got something going on. My brother struggles more. He goes to school for computer game design, he just literally doesn't have the resources that he needs. Like he should be in a game lab every day programming and taking up their Internet, but instead is here and struggling with that. It's a matter of like, you get, you wake up in the morning and you stake out space somewhere in the house where everyone's quiet. Um, but yeah, so it's a struggle every day to do school, never mind to, like, be able to pay attention and intake information and perform well in classes like my performance, my school is not my number one worry. My number one worry is “Where am I going to put my laptop?”

I did get money from school. I got money from their emergency fund, which was great. When it first came out, thought that was wonderful. I felt that there should have been more emergency funding, which should have gone towards students in general. I feel like tuition should have been cut by a much larger amount than it was. But I also think that AU is similar with the more general government view. It's just, it's just letting people fend for themselves. They're waiting for us to ask them for help, when that's so not what's needed right now.

It's one of those things where I feel like a lot of professors don't understand that home life doesn't mean that I'm just here doing exactly what I would be doing at school. I'm living a different life. I'm back in high school. Um, but yeah, and so just thinking about how my teachers support me or just teachers that get, who depend on participation points on having my camera on...sometimes I can't, I can't even hear people unless I have my camera off. Like, I can't look, the Internet's not good enough or things like that. Or like just, I have to be doing other things like I am loading the dishwasher and listening to you, Professor, but I'm not going to be interacting directly in that sense. I think a lot of professors definitely, like, they're looser and they're being more helpful. I definitely am getting more emails from my professors checking in and being like, hey, if something's late, like not necessarily being like, “Hey it's late,” but like, “Are you okay?” Which I appreciate.

[Pauses, takes a breath.]

Your students need help. Your students need your help, and that does not mean that they need \$6,000. And that does not mean they need a personalized phone call every week. That means a different thing for every single student, and until you help every single student in the way that they need to be helped, you won't have a successful university. Like, these people won't be able to succeed if you don't help them the way that they need to be helped. And that's gonna be different for every single student, but we all need it. We all need that help.

“The American Dream Is Dead”

HANNAH RUTH:

Well, first, I'll say the American Dream is totally fucked. It's so screwball. The American Dream is remnants of like, Teddy Roosevelt, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, bullshit. And, we as a country have to move on from that. Like when you're a kid they teach you like, the, the essentials you need are like food, water, and shelter. And the fact that we don't believe in the third thing as being an essential to human life is horrible. It's like, abhorrent. So I don't know, like, right now, the housing crisis is so bad. And everyone is selling their homes, and trying to find a cheaper place to live and fleeing the cities for the suburbs.

One of my biggest fears in life is that I'll end up on the street. Even as a little kid, I was afraid that our house was gonna burn down, and we would be homeless. I was, you know, like, I used to put all of my prized belongings in a trash bag and leave them by the front door every night for like, two years, as a little kid, I did this, because I was so afraid that our house was gonna burn down, and we would be homeless, and I wouldn't have like, my prized things. Which is like, why is a six-year-old thinking about that? But I've always been afraid of being homeless. I have also known that while my parents are alive, that would not happen. And I've always known that, like, I can get a job and figure it out. And this pandemic has proven that's not the case. Like, I still have my job, and I'm very thankful for that, but a lot of people had very secure jobs that no longer are unemployed. And so, I saw, I don't know if it was a tweet or a statistic or what it was, but it was basically like, “You are closer to being homeless than you are to being rich.” I think the American Dream is such that like, anyone can be – can make it, anyone can be rich, anyone can do it. And the fact of the matter is, that's not true. And so I always believed that, like, if I worked hard enough, if I've reached my goals, like, if I went to the right college, if I like, saved the right amount of money, I could do anything. I could make it. And I, that's just not true. So much of it is about privilege and luck and like, being the right person at the right time.

I just, like, sit in America every day and just am like, how did this melting pot of amazing peoples and cultures blow up in our face? Like, how did we let it get this bad? Um... It's just like, I, I don't even – I don't even know. It's like, I blinked my eyes, and Mitch McConnell is a lizard man, and our president is not only a laughingstock, but he's just a public menace.

I think also people...I think also on some level, a lot of people just didn't know how bad it was, and me included, really realized, like, when Trump was elected in 2016, I cried. But now I'm sort of like, angry, just angry at this country and angry at the people in it. And I've kind of given up like, I feel no love for this country. I feel no like, um, connection to it. I was born here. I was raised here. Like, I had amazing opportunities as a kid. And yet I feel no love towards it. I harbor ill will.

I mean, I think in terms of this pandemic, the government has just failed at every turn. They can't get it under control. They can't do basic things like mandate a mass-mask policy. Their approach to the Black Lives Matter movement was horrible. Like who does that? The pandemic has done what a pandemic does, you know, it causes a lot of strife. But I think the government's mishandling of it is why we are still so screwed. There are countries around the world that have gotten it under control, that are continuing to take precautions, um, and then there's us, and we just can't be fucked.

I think...the American Dream is dead. And with it, the mirage that, that, like the idea that America is like this beautiful, shining, better place, when in reality, if you just pick at – pick at it a little bit, it's always been a bad place. And I think now all of its ugliness is just surfacing and coming to a head. And so for me to feel content living in America, we have to flip the whole government. And so to feel content, I don't even – I don't think it's possible. Like, content? I feel like maybe one day I could feel safe? Or like one day I could feel...indifferent? I'm not sure I could ever feel content here. It would take a lot.

Housing and COVID-19 Resources

Government Agencies / COVID-19 Relief

D.C. Housing Resources: <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/rent>

D.C. Emergency Rental Assistance Program: <https://dhs.dc.gov/service/emergency-rental-assistance-program>

D.C. Unemployment Compensation Process: <https://does.dc.gov/service/unemployment-compensation-process>

Federal CARES Act Unemployment Compensation: <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/recovery-individuals>

Advocacy

Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development: <https://www.cnhed.org/resources/>
 Housing Counseling resources
 Legal Services
 Homeless Services
 D.C. Housing Search
 D.C. Tenant Bill of Rights
 Washington D.C. Tenant Survival Guide

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia: <https://www.legalaiddc.org/housing-law/>

Just Shelter.org: <https://justshelter.org/>

Housing Up!: <https://housingup.org/>

Stomp Out Slumlords D.C.: www.stompoutslumlords.org

Miriam's Kitchen: <https://miriamskitchen.org/>

Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland: <https://www.fairhousingmd.org/>

National Low Income Housing Coalition: <https://nlihc.org/>

Richmond Tenants Union: <https://richmondtenantsunion.org>

Housing Groups In The DMV

Washington D.C. Housing, Rooms, Apartments, Sublets: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1468086266815937/>

Ghostlight Housing D.C.: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/339946346651940>

Queer Housing Washington D.C.: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/339946346651940/>

In general, also Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist.

