

## *The New Year's Outbreak* (January 2020)

Tonight I cried.

I've been down for days.

It's been 9 years, since the last time I was home for Spring Festival.

Time flies.

I still feel like I just came here,  
the country that I thought was far,  
the country I now have to call home,  
the country that still sees me as a foreigner.

I still remember the damp smell of O'Hare and the repeating Welcome to America video at customs. It was August 13, 2011.

Time flies.

I'm still learning.

Time flies.

I'm still unlearning,

Whoa, it's been almost a decade.

At home,

除夕<sup>1</sup>,

Nainai cooks and we help;  
We welcome our ancestors back home;  
We bow to elders;  
We watch the gala;  
We get red packets;  
We play majiang;  
We light fireworks;  
We stay up late.

初一<sup>2</sup>,

We go to the temple;  
We eat vegetarian;  
We walk around town;  
We run into relatives;  
We buy new clothes;  
We eat more.

初二<sup>3</sup>,

We visit the faraway loved ones.  
We climb up the mountain,  
the great grandparents' grave is on the left,  
Yeye's spot is on the right.

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<sup>1</sup> New Year's Eve

<sup>2</sup> Day one of the New Year

<sup>3</sup> Day two of the New Year

We have a picnic with Yeye;  
It's usually rice noodles that Nainai prepared.  
There's usually chicken, pastries, fruit, and cigarettes.  
Yeye loved cigarettes.  
I tell him my wishes,  
it was usually about school.  
The last time I visited Yeye was 2010,  
Nainai was leading us on the hike.  
She carried a basket full of snacks.  
I called Nainai a few days ago.  
She said she can't climb up the mountain anymore.  
She stays home on 初二 now.

初三<sup>4</sup>,

We visit neighbors and relatives;  
We light more fireworks.  
We play more majiang.  
It's always great to win money,  
I use it all on fireworks.

初四<sup>5</sup>,

I go back to Kunming with Ma and Ba.  
I always looked forward to this annual road trip.  
I get to chew sugar cane.  
Ma lets me spit it out the window.  
There's always good food at the stops.  
Ba always tells dumb jokes to keep our spirit up.

初五, 初六, 初七<sup>6</sup>,

There's always something going on.

Here, on New Year's eve,

I've taken tests,  
I've done homework,  
I've walked to class through knee-high snow,  
I've barbecued with friends,  
I've ran shifts at Ford,  
I've cooked,  
I've concluded JoLLE<sup>7</sup>,  
I've celebrated with Ma, Ba, Matt, Dirk,  
I haven't been home.

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<sup>4</sup> Day three of the New Year

<sup>5</sup> Day four of the New Year

<sup>6</sup> Day five, six, and seven of the New Year

<sup>7</sup> The Journal of Language and Literacy Education Winter Conference in Athens

Tonight I cried.

I can only see my family through a screen;  
Ma told me she misses me more than ever on days like this;  
My friends are sending red packets in Wechat.

But who am I to be sad,  
and who am I to cry.

On this New Year's Eve,

Wuhan is on lock down;  
Doctors are working day and night;  
Volunteers are leaving home;  
The numbers are shooting up;  
The infected are fighting death.  
I'm sure they cried too,

Each number is a story.  
I'm doing nothing to help.

人有悲欢离合,  
月有阴晴圆缺<sup>8</sup>。

After all, I guess it's all about leaving town.  
It's all about coming back to town.

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<sup>8</sup> These are lines from the poetry of Chinese poet Su Shi. Literally translated, it means people have sorrow, happiness, departure, and reunions; the moon could be gloomy, bright, full, and dark. Figuratively, it is used to express that the course of life is unavoidably imperfect and the poet's acceptance of the unpredictable.

## When? (July 2020)

#loss                      #travelban                      #wearamask  
#3,950,151cases                      #BlackLivesMatter  
#joyisresistance  
#saytheirname                      #sayhername                      #quarantine  
#travelban                      #greif  
#icantbreath                      #ChinaVirus  
#KungFlu                      #COVID-19  
#留学生带病回国                      #143,864deaths

Who would've thought,  
I'm still talking to Mama and Baba twice a day.  
The routine began in January.  
This time around,  
they are worried about me.

“你别出去啊。<sup>9</sup>”  
“出去要戴口罩啊。<sup>10</sup>”  
“在外面别跟别人起冲突啊。<sup>11</sup>”  
“今年你也回不来了啊。<sup>12</sup>”  
“还是要注意照顾自己啊。<sup>13</sup>”  
“妈妈急的昨晚没睡着。<sup>14</sup>”

We started self-quarantine.  
I needed a routine.  
Exercise, work, lunch, work, exercise, dinner, bedtime, repeat.  
Instead, I'm stuck on the couch.  
Scroll, scroll, scroll, repeat.

*“Confirmed cases in the U.S. hit 10,000.”*  
*“Bring your virus and go back to China.”*  
*“You do not belong here!”*  
*“There's an African American man threatening my life.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Don't go out in public.

<sup>10</sup> If you go out, make sure to wear a mask.

<sup>11</sup> Avoid conflict with others when you go out.

<sup>12</sup> You can't come back this year.

<sup>13</sup> You still have to take care of yourself.

<sup>14</sup> Mama was so worried I couldn't sleep all night last night.

*“Why are you Chinese people killing everyone?”*

*“祖国建设你不在，千里投毒你最快。<sup>15</sup>”*

*“8 minutes and 46 seconds.”*

*“Schools must reopen in the fall!”*

*“International students must return to their countries if their schools go online.”*

It's hard to track, there is so much loss.

Time, loneliness, death, divisiveness, envisioned future, humanity...

There is joy, I hold on to these moments.

Homemade erkuai<sup>16</sup>, game nights, husband, sisterhood, communities, morning walks...

Who would've thought,

The second wave is here before the first wave even ended.

I tried to find joy,

I tried to stay resilient.

But when can we go out and hug our neighbors with no fear again?

When?

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<sup>15</sup> A trending slogan on Chinese social media: “When our country is growing, you're not here. Now you're the fastest to bring the virus back.”

<sup>16</sup> 饵块, rice cake local to my province, Yunnan.