

LIVE READING MARCH 19

from the writings that kept us all going in 2020
and speak today to the power of community

**3 p.m. in the Doña Benicia Room
Benicia Public Library
Readings/Conversation/Refreshments
Free—Everyone welcome**

Three years ago on March 19 our world tipped sideways. Everything changed. Schools closed. Businesses closed. Factories closed. Art galleries, restaurants, bars, places of worship. All closed. We were physically isolated at home, masked when we ventured out.

We are still coming to terms with the fallout from those months in 2020 when, as poet Lois Requist wrote in early April, “The craving for normalcy grows like an empty stomach.” In October 2020 an anonymous twelve-year-old asked, “Dear Future, Will you be there for me?” These writings and many more appeared in the *Benicia Herald’s* newspaper column “Going The Distance—Yearning To Breathe Free.” Readers called the column “a lifeline,” “a chronicle of our shared history,” with writings that “consistently stir truth...desperately needed truth.”

This year on March 19, local writers and poets will offer a live reading of those writings from 2020. The collected “Going The Distance” columns from April 1 through November 1 have been published as a book entitled *Yearning To Breathe Free*. The collected columns turn out to be our community’s journal of that eventful period. The writings are “a raw, unmediated testimony to hope and fear, anger and despair, inspired by events as they unfolded.” The writings are also testimony to the power of story and poetry to encourage individuals, strengthen community, and confront significant issues in a time of multiple crises.

Copies of the book *Yearning To Breathe Free—A Community Journal of 2020* will be available for purchase at the reading. The book, published by Benicia Literary Arts, is available online at benicialiteraryarts.org/store/product/17. The book is also available at Bookshop Benicia, and in Vallejo at Alibi Books and at Ethnic Notions Fine Art Gallery & Multicultural Bookstore.

