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Long Division in The Time of Quarantine

Ellen Sazzman

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Ellen Sazzman has recently been published in *A3 Review*, *PANK*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Eklebrastic Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Sow's Ear*, *Lilith*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Southward*, *Dash*, *Miramar*, *Common Ground*, and *CALYX*, among others. Sazzman received an honorable mention in the 2019 Allen Ginsberg poetry contest, was shortlisted for the 2018 O'Donoghue Poetry Prize, and was awarded first place in Poetica's 2016 Anna Rosenberg poetry competition. Sazzman was also a 2012 Pushcart Prize nominee by *Bloodroot Literary Magazine* and a 2010 Split this Rock finalist. Her poetry collection, *The Shomer* (Finishing Line Press 2021), was a finalist for the Blue Lynx Prize, a semifinalist for the Elixir Press Antivenom Award, and a semifinalist for the Codhill Press Poetry Award. Sazzman is a writer living in Maryland, although Sazzman grew up in Cleveland, Ohio.

Long Division in The Time of Quarantine

Charlotte does not want to learn Long Division.

Who can blame her – the operation's not child's play.

Marshalling Digits, more Digits than

She possesses. Digits separated

For their own good into

Columns, hundreds, tens, ones,

Soldiers in lockstep,

Obeying orders, carrying Down

Carrying Down, always less and

Less.

Mother the MD is worried the Pandemic has become endemic.

Self-Isolation, the solution, is not spontaneous,

Cannot be calculated in the head or on fingers.

Deployment requires a strategy, supply lines,

Paper, pencil to notate the problem, an eraser

For mistakes. Artillery. Grandma is enlisted

To zoom-teach. Grandma is practiced for better
Or worse at apportioning
Affection and paring
Back.

Charlotte hates all those D words and that lopsided bracket
Missing a leg that shields Dividend from Divisor
Until the siege when Divisor invades Dividend
Repeatedly and takes away, takes away,
Deriving, finally, the quotient whole number
With/without a remainder,
Leftover phantom, a sum
Sometimes estimated into a nullity,
A zeroing out some Denounce as
Assault.

Grandma imparts safety in numbers. Pairs split too easily.
Pairs are the answer, chants Charlotte. *Into Noah's ark*
The animals come marching two by two. She wants
To press her mouth against her best friend's ear,
Whisper of the boy she has a crush on and the body
That was hers ripening into another's, secrets
She no longer shares with her mother.
The amputee bracket stands
Upright under its weight of
Correctness.