

A LITTLE BIT SOFTER NOW

Hope springs; spring hopes

BY SARA CAMP MILAM



LATELY I NOTICE A SHIFT IN MY editorial quirks. In years past, I declared my distaste for stories about grandmas and farms. They're too expected, I said. I've heard them all before, I believed. "I don't care about your grandma!" I even proclaimed from more than one podium. And I fretted over what I believed to be an excess of personal essays in food media, to the exclusion of original reporting. Excuse me while I procure a knife and fork with which to eat my words. In this issue of *Gravy*, you'll read

personal essays. You'll read farm stories. You'll read, yes, a personal essay about farming. And you know what? It's beautiful, and I love it, and so will you. No grandmas here, but the way things are going, I might be convinced to rescind my moratorium. Call me soft. Call me old. Call me human.

On-the-ground reporting was much harder this past year. Still, *Gravy* writers and podcast producers found creative, effective, and safe ways to tell stories. Many turned logistical challenges into

opportunities for reflection. They didn't bring themselves into their stories to navel-gaze, but rather to illuminate larger truths and give voice to shared emotions and experiences. They used narrative to approximate camaraderie in a year of isolation. I believe that's a kind of hope.

For those of you wondering (ie, no one), I have yet to invest in the punching bag I considered in my last editor's note. I still have days when it would come in handy. But, for the first time in more than a year, I'm writing this editor's note from

my desk at SFA World Headquarters (SFAWHQ) in Barnard Observatory on the University of Mississippi campus. I'm grateful that working from home remains an option, but I'm beyondgrateful that I can be here. As I type this, my colleague Annemarie Anderson, SFA's oral historian, is on the phone in her office, giving an interview on slugburgers for a podcast. By the time this issue of *Gravy* hits mailboxes, we'll have a new full-time colleague on Team SFA. Zaire Love, an alumna of the MFA program in Documentary Expression at UM, becomes our second Pihakis Documentary Filmmaker in April.

The sun is out, the weather is warm, and the daffodils are blooming. Pending babysitter availability, my husband and I are contemplating our first dine-in restaurant meal in thirteen months. I'll

In the last year, *Gravy* writers have turned logistical challenges into opportunities for narrative reflection.

take these bits of hope and run with them, thank you very much.

Here's one more—a very specific wish I borrowed from a lockdown-era conversation with my colleague Melissa Hall. I hope that, by the end of 2021, we'll hold weekly staff meetings in person here at SFAWHQ, eating Swedish Fish out of a communal bag the way we did before COVID. We're not there yet. Maybe we won't get there this year. But it's spring, and I'm giving myself permission to daydream. 🍷

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