



KNOT TODAY

A turn toward the light

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

THERE WAS A TIME IN MY LIFE, namely college and the first couple of years thereafter, when I could read a heavy novel or listen to sad-sack indie rock music for the better part of a day, often capped off by an hours-long nap. One term for this is depression. Another is having too much time on your hands. I've experienced both of these conditions, individually and in tandem. They are emotional quicksand.

Some fifteen years later, my idle time is much more limited. So is my emotional bandwidth, a fact I discovered in the months after giving birth to my first child. (I could handle *The West Wing* and little else during my maternity leave with Sally.) In the last five years, I've constantly negotiated that emotional budget, spending and saving as the demands of my family and my work—and the fluctuations of my mental health—allow. Maybe you're the

Julia M. Watercolor/Creative Market

same way. Maybe most of us are.

The length of my morning commute is no more than three songs, one of my favorite luxuries of living in a relatively small town. Lately, Sally and I sing along to the Trolls theme song, Justin Timberlake's "Can't Stop the Feeling." By the time we pull into the circle drive at her preschool on the University of Mississippi campus, we're halfway through the next track in our family playlist, the Proclaimers' "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)," which Sally calls "Da-da-lun-da." As I double back through campus to my parking spot near SFA World Headquarters, I'll switch to a few minutes' worth of my latest audiobook mystery or a feel-good Lizzo anthem, depending on whether I'm feeling cozy, or in need of a boost.

After the children go to bed at night, Kirk and I choose a show calibrated to our dwindling reserves of emotional and intellectual engagement. Lately, that means an episode of *The Great British Baking Show*. If I'm lucky, I'll cap it off with a few pages of a novel—I'm a long-time sucker for mysteries, especially if they're set in some windswept corner of the British Isles.

Despite these attempts at balancing my emotional budget, I've also managed to consume a staggering volume of doom-and-gloom news in this era of COVID, climate change, and contentious politics. *The Great British Baking Show* can only help so much if you're doomscrolling virus statistics on your phone at the same time.

I'm not advocating for heads in the sand, and I don't wish to downplay or dismiss any number of very real, very tragic global phenomena. But I had to change my habits. Enter knitting.

Late this summer, as a new school year began against a backdrop of maxed-out hospitals, vaccine holdouts, and mask resistance, I asked SFA oral historian Annemarie Anderson to teach me how

to knit. Soon, instead of estimating Sally's chance of COVID exposure at school based on county- and state-level data, I was two feet into a scarf of my own making—a soft, thick merino wool in a soothing shade of deep teal.

In these pages, there is both tragedy and hope. Small-business owners and community fixtures succumb to COVID-19. Herbicides drift over farms, wreaking havoc with crops. People face food insecurity and hunger. But children step up to fill their fathers' shoes; the judicial process does its job; and neighbors feed neighbors. Darkness and light. The way of the world.

It has always been my goal for *Gravy*, both print and podcast, to make you think. And sometimes that means that our stories challenge. They confront uncomfortable truths, or they unearth painful history with present-day resonance. But as we look ahead to 2022, my colleagues and I are recommitting ourselves to tell stories that delight and entertain you, too.

Not long ago, *The New York Times* published a list of the best television comedies of the 2000s. In writing about *Parks and Recreation*, a favorite show of mine, critic Margaret Lyons made an observation that has stuck with me: "...there's artistry in pleasure, too, and...companionship and joy are not vices." She's right, I believe. Joy matters. So does wonder, and yes, humor, too. I need it right now. Maybe you do as well.

Last weekend, I finished my first scarf. As soon as I bound off the last row, my fingers began to itch for the next project. Any day now, a new set of needles and a skein of dove-gray yarn should arrive in the mail, and I'll begin making a winter hat for my son. It feels good to create something that I hope will be beautiful, something that has meaning, something that someone can use. 🧶