

How Can I Help You Understand? From a High School Senior Athlete Parent

Write. It's what I do. It's what I'm paid to do. As an English teacher, I help others do it better. So where can I turn when I feel like an exposed nerve? I need to write.

I wish I could be brilliant like Markus Zusak in writing *The Book Thief* and write as the COVID virus, to explain how and why I have wreaked havoc upon the land. I wish I could be as sensitive as poet Billy Collins, capturing loss while acknowledging the feebleness of my vocabulary to do it.

But I'm just a mom. Of a devastated senior: an athlete, a loyal friend, a scholar, an artist, an incredible daughter, and sister, among other things.

How can I help you understand? You who do not have a senior in high school... or a senior athlete... or a senior performer?

Let me start and say it once, lest I seem insensitive or out-of-touch: I am deeply saddened for the loss of life suffered by many as a result of this virus. It is tragic and unthinkable. The doctors and EMTs in my inner circle are on the front lines, and for them and for their courage I am thankful. When I tell people, "Stay safe," I mean it. I do not minimize pain.

That said, let me try to help you understand ours.

I apologize to my "parents-in-arms" those parents of stage and music performers. Particularly the "theater kids." Many of you had your spring shows pulled out from under you in the week of the performance. I share your pain, and I know that I will not do it justice as I concentrate on the senior athletes. I hope that one of you will write, as I have, to share a pathway for others to try to understand.

The layers of this loss are deep and intertwined and it starts here: we all had a senior year. We all only get one. Except for these seniors. We laughed in the spring air on picnic tables in the courtyard... we joked with our favorite teachers, they, knowing it was unlikely we would finish their assignments, and we, knowing they knew it... we got our yearbooks signed by our BFFs and people we knew we would never see again... we took our last exams and sat at graduation practice, singing Alice Cooper's "School's Out" in our heads... we planned the seating for the prom table... and we donned the caps and gowns on a hot football field or in a sweltering gym floor to smile and cry with and hug these people—some for the last time—honored for our accomplishments.

They won't. Either not at all or not the way we did.

No final art show. No final spring concert. No final clean-out of the locker. And no final walk on or off the playing field or track or course or court.

The senior athlete. There are many who suffer this loss of "the final season." For those of you never involved in sports, or whose children harbor other interests, the significance of this may be lost on you. My daughter's story is one of many and starts in tee ball at age 6. Too early? Probably. But she was never the kid chasing butterflies in the outfield (however, she did pick a hangnail or two). She loved it. She stuck with it. She and my husband spent wonderful hours together, learning to "wave goodbye to the ball" and lining up the knuckles of her hands on the bat for proper form. It was amazing to see her love for the game (and for her dad) grow as the seasons passed. She was a little wisp of a thing: tiny and easy to overlook. Until you see her throw. Until you see the power when she hits. In-town rec ball... travel ball... club ball, traveling from Massachusetts to Virginia Beach. She ate it all up, working hard. Waiting. For varsity ball. For it all to

pay off.

When she was nine, we knew that the powerhouse athlete a year older than she was a catcher: like my daughter. We knew then that my daughter would have one season to start at her position in high school: her senior year. Yes: we knew then. That's what people don't understand. It isn't about not playing for just this year. It's about a lifetime dream being obliterated. She waited... she practiced... she played other positions and did everything asked. And she didn't even get to step into the uniform or onto the field this year.

Not a single at-bat.

Not a single throw.

Not a scrimmage. Not a game. Not a championship. Not a varsity letter. Not a senior day. Not a photograph. Not a banquet. Not a chance at honors or to break a personal record. The year will have no record that my daughter was even a spring athlete in the year 2020. Nine years of work snuffed out like a match in the wind.

There is something very special about playing for your town... for your school. We live in the town in which my husband grew up. His soccer team won a state championship during his junior year and their year hangs on the championship banner that floats overhead in the gym. His team will be inducted into the school hall of fame this coming fall. My son's football team won back-to-back state championships and also has those years raised on a banner in the same gym. He will, no doubt, also be in the hall of fame someday as a member of those teams. My daughter wanted so badly to join her dad and her brother, the year 2020 flying overhead. She wanted for her team to win the big one. With her friends. She can speak to her teammates about the magic of "the banner" because it's in her blood. She gets it. And now she can't.

And for the senior athlete who finally made the varsity roster this year, and for the senior athlete who had lost his/her junior season due to injury and just rehabbed your way back, and for the senior athlete who just loves to be on the bus, enjoying the camaraderie of the team: my heart has a crack for every one of you, too. Soon, I'm going to look like the vase that the Brady kids broke after Carol had said, "don't play ball in the house": cracked and leaking...draining the water left in me that hasn't already poured from my eyes.

For the people who pat us on our proverbial heads and say, "Well, at least your senior didn't have to head to Vietnam," or, "At least your senior didn't have to sacrifice during WWII," I say, please stop. I ask that you not compare sacrifice and loss: ours and our kids' is real and organic and deep and raw. It is theirs and it is ours.

I won't apologize for claiming the loss as also my own for the parents involved. Whether this is your last child (as my daughter is ours), your only child, or somewhere else in the birth order, these milestones and achievements are our loss, right along with them. Our identities as parents are bound up in our kids. And that's the gorgeous joy and abyss of pain of our roles as parents. I have dear friends who lost a child not long ago. Make no mistake: in no way do I equate the losses for our kids and our families to their family's permanent, unthinkable agony. What I do want to illustrate is that pain has many forms. All real. All genuine. All valued. All painful.

So how can I help you understand? "You're only as happy as your unhappiest child."

That's how.

Cindy Gagliardi
Westfield

Compassion: A Core Principle of The Mental Health Council

Last week, to kick off our letters to the editor for Mental Health Awareness Month, the Westfield Mental Health Council introduced its concept of CAKE, which is an acronym for behaviors that we are working to promote: compassion, acceptance, kindness, empathy. These are the "ingredients" that can enable a stigma-free community.

We believe that the principles of CAKE can assist us in creating a team-based response to the issues that confront us — in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

What is compassion? Webster's defines compassion as "sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others."

Compassion is what empowers us as a community to move beyond witnessing events or circumstances with care to taking action on those feelings — and then uniting in our action to have the greatest positive impact. Instead of two hands, we want to apply four hands, eight hands, 26 hands, 138 hands, and even more, to meet the opportunity to care through action, not just thoughts or words.

Community compassion is simple, if we work together. Look at some of the things we have already done as a community. Jon Rzeznik of the GooGoo Dolls had a simple idea for a porch concert and as a community we turned it into more than \$240K in

a We Love Local Fund to support retail businesses. Joe and Audrey Mindak painted a patriotic pallet, and now residents have bought hundreds of them to raise almost \$10K to date. Feed the Frontline, started by Steve and Michelle Voice in an effort to support healthcare workers and our local restaurants, has raised \$102K from over one thousand donors. The fundraising levels are impressive, for sure, but it is the acts of community compassion keeping these activities going that are the key.

Small acts are just as important as these larger ones. The acts of compassion that are occurring inside the walls of your own home or across the fences between yards are tremendously impactful, and all of these gestures spread a vital message of care as we build connections even while socially distanced.

Gathering everyone in a virtual setting where we can find these shared feelings is our first task, and we hope that the CAKE banner will give us these opportunities. You can find more information on the CAKE initiative, as well as additional mental health resources at www.westfieldnj.gov/mentalhealth. Lastly, please feel free to send your CAKE-filled thoughts and ideas to cake@westfieldnj.gov.

Ron Holmes
Sub-Committee Member
Westfield Mental Health Council

Letters to the Editor

Sewing Warriors Are Filling The Gap In War Against COVID-19

During World War I the Red Cross issued patterns for volunteers to make operating gowns and masks for doctors on the frontlines. In World War II the Production Corps of the Red Cross made and repaired 64 million pieces of clothing and prepared over 2.5 billion surgical dressings. In the current war that is being fought against COVID-19, people all over the country are sewing masks for themselves, family and friends, healthcare workers, and those who work in nursing homes.

When I started sewing masks in March I knew I wanted to help, but part of me thought the effort was in vain. What healthcare worker is going to use these masks I asked myself as I drove from Westfield to Overlook Medical Center? They're not surgical grade. Well, it turned out homemade masks are in high demand. Volunteers from the Facebook Group "NJ Sews in Unity" have made and distributed more than 5,300 masks to New Jersey hospitals and government entities, such as the Atlantic Health System, the East Orange Veterans Administration, Newark Beth Israel, and the Raritan Bay Medical Center, among others. There are about 310 volunteers who sew, cut fabric, donate materials, or search for elastic, a hot commodity that is hard to come by.

Shannon Coulter of Union runs the Facebook Group with Marci Kleinberg Bendelli, Margaret Shore Illis and Divine Miss Jay. "I got involved because it's important and so needed. It's something concrete that you can point to and say we did this. But it's really ridiculous that we have to do it. Doctors and nurses shouldn't be using our homemade masks, even though many of them use the masks over professional ones to extend the life of their masks. We're going to keep going until the people in charge get it together," Ms. Coulter said.

Cranford to Create Virtual Graduation

The state director of emergency management recently released guidance on graduation ceremonies. Unfortunately, the state is only permitting virtual graduation ceremonies to be planned at this time. We know that this is very disappointing news. However, please know that we will work hard to create a very special and memorable virtual experience of which our senior students, parents/guardians, and community members will be proud. Towards this end, Mr. Cantagallo, the Cranford High School principal, will work with students, parents/guardians, and community members to create a virtual graduation ceremony that will take place on June 18. The District will also provide an in-person ceremony as soon as practicable and in accordance with state law.

As the guidance also applies to all year-end celebrations, each school will work towards providing virtual experiences for other traditionally celebrated grade levels, again with an eye toward creating in-person experiences, as soon as practicable and in accordance with state law.

Each principal will reach out to their respective communities to provide planning updates.

These are truly challenging times in a lot of ways. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope." We are a resilient community and we will get through this together!

Thank you for your partnership and your flexibility throughout this emotional and evolving situation.

Dr. Scott Rubin
Superintendent of Schools
Cranford

Dr. Pam Brug, vice-president of the New Jersey Black Women Physicians Association, is one grateful recipient of the masks. "In church we always say 'time, talents and tithes.' These women have given it all. Some are impacted, some are not working and don't know where the next check is coming from, some have the virus, some know someone who died, and they just put their energy into helping us on the frontline. From the moment this started they organized, and boom, started to deliver."

Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle is also seeking volunteers to sew, not masks, but isolation gowns for long-term care facilities. These facilities have been particularly hard hit with more than 10,000 deaths nationwide. Here in New Jersey, about 50 percent of the more than 8,200 residents who have succumbed to the disease have died in long-term care facilities. These facilities are the battlefront of this war. Once the virus gains entry it is almost impossible to stop it from sweeping through much of the population.

The Mayor's post included a link to a free pattern from peekaboopatternshop.com, so I printed it out from my computer, scotch-taped it together, and started cutting up gently used bed sheets. As I pinned the pieces together and sewed the gowns it made me so incredibly sad that the workers at the nursing homes and the patients have to rely on gently used bed sheets to protect them from a deadly virus. The most-at-risk amongst us, our grandparents, our mothers and fathers, are now relying on the kindness of strangers to sew our bed sheets together to protect them.

"I want to help what I consider to be our most vulnerable residents by tapping into the civic-mindedness and talents of our community, but I have to ask what happened to our ability to harness the greatness of our country to make great things? We can't get swabs, we have people in their dining rooms sewing masks, what is going on?" said Mayor Brindle.

Think about that for a minute. The greatest country in the world can't supply its workers or its residents with the basic protections they need. You would think that a country with our financial resources could start churning out masks and surgical gowns in a matter of days, but all the sewing machines and the women who run them are now in other countries. If anyone in charge is interested there's a free pattern at peekaboopatternshop.com.

Since I wrote this piece Mitch Gambert of Bespoke by Gambert has donated the fabric for 150 surgical gowns for long-term care facilities.

Ann Ormsby
Westfield

PUBLIC NOTICE

UNION COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

May 8, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

Under the terms of the "Open Public Meetings Act P.L. 1975, C. 231, and pursuant to requirements of N.J.S.A. 10: 4-10 of the Open Public Meetings Act, please be advised the Freeholder Agenda Setting Session and Regular Meeting of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders scheduled to be held on Thursday, May 14, 2020 have been canceled. Any resolutions that were scheduled to be heard have been rescheduled to be heard at the Thursday, May 21, 2020 Agenda Setting Session and Regular Meeting.

Please note, the time and place of the May 21, 2020 Agenda Setting Session and Regular Meeting will remain; with the Agenda Setting Session to commence at 5 p.m. and the Regular Meeting to commence as soon as possible after the Agenda Setting Session. Please note, both the Agenda Setting Session and the Regular Meeting will continue to be held remotely via Zoom Webinar as previously noticed.

James E. Pelletiere, RMC, QPA
Clerk of the Board
1 T - 05/14/20, The Leader Fee: \$27.54

Health Officer, Staff Have Provided Many Hours of Selfless Dedication

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mayor has provided strong leadership for the town to fully respond to the ongoing demands resulting from it. And fortunately for us, Megan Avallone, RN, MS, our health officer, has led the Westfield Regional Health Department (WRHD). She and the WRHD staff have provided extraordinary COVID-19-related services for us and our seven participating neighboring municipalities, in addition to the routine public health services we continue to need.

The WRHD has been and will continue to actively monitor the evolving situation involving COVID-19 in New Jersey. Please see: <https://www.westfieldnj.gov/coronavirus>. In addition, it has and will continue to review and provide guidance for our town's leaders and residents. The WRHD services and actions have included the following:

- Conducting hundreds of investigations of confirmed positive cases and following-up on them, including contact tracing.
- Completing contact tracings.
- Providing hundreds of individual, business and group consultations.
- Communicating with local schools and health care providers to provide updated guidance.
- Providing assistance to the local long-term care facilities in light of the documented increased risk of COVID-19 for people who live and work there.
- Participating in New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information and guidance conference calls and webinars.
- Maintaining daily contact with the state epidemiologist on the changing situation.
- Conducting collaborative meetings with the other public health agencies from the surrounding area.
- Reviewing applicable emergency plans and procedures, including the Department's pandemic plan.

So far in this pandemic, at least 241 of our fellow residents have had confirmed COVID-19. I am certain that many more were infected, but were not tested and confirmed. Of these, 35 of our neighbors have died, of whom

PUBLIC NOTICE

TOWNSHIP OF CRANFORD PLANNING BOARD

TAKE NOTICE that on the 6th of May the Planning Board of the Township of Cranford, in the County of Union took the following actions:

1. **Application PB-20-001:** Granted approval to Carwen Management, LLC for a conditional use of an existing structure for an HVAC Company on Block 183 Lot 6 as designated on the Township Tax Map also known as 113 North Avenue West in the D-B Zone.

Kathy Lenahan
Board Administrator
1 T - 05/14/20, The Leader Fee: \$15.81

almost half were residents of a long-term care facility. Although we have passed through the beginning of the first phase, we will likely see more people infected, get sick and die and many others indirectly affected. This means that each resident will continue to need to tolerate some difficulties and inconveniences in order to protect our families, neighbors and ourselves as the "new normal" takes hold. However, I remain optimistic, because I have seen how adaptable, resourceful and resilient we are. One hundred years ago, no one could have predicted that the then deadly influenza pandemic, which killed about 675,000 Americans, would be followed by relative prosperity, but that's what happened.

At this time, the members of the Westfield Board of Health and I would like to thank Ms. Avallone and the entire staff of the WRHD for their many hours of selfless dedication to provide public health services to help and support us. We are sure that they will continue to do a terrific job and spend much more time providing essential public health services for all of us as this pandemic unfolds.

In doing so, we should all consider the tremendous value of having a strong public health infrastructure, like we have, with dedicated, high quality and resourced professional and support staff. Unfortunately, in the nation and in New Jersey, public health has too often been neglected, as evidenced by the recent diminution of the CDC, the gutting of the NJDOH during the last decade, and the anti-science agendas supported by the climate change deniers and anti-vaccinationists. Hopefully, our leaders and fellow citizens will remember these days and be supportive of public health departments, personnel, programs and policies after the pandemic passes.

Lawrence D. Budnick, MD, MPH
President, Westfield Board of Health
Westfield

PUBLIC NOTICE

TOWN OF WESTFIELD WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY GENERAL ORDINANCE NO. 2170 CALENDAR YEAR 2020 ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH A CAP BANK (N.J.S.A. 40A:4-45.14)

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the foregoing ordinance was approved for final adoption by the Town Council of the Town of Westfield at a Regular Meeting held on May 12, 2020.

Tara Rowley, RMC
Town Clerk
1 T - 05/14/20, The Leader Fee: \$16.83

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Special Subscription Offer

Dear Reader,

My name is Lauren Barr and I am the NEW Publisher and Editor-In-Chief of *The Westfield Leader* newspaper.

Whether you are a past subscriber or a first time reader, I would like to have you as a subscriber to our newspaper so that we can keep you up-to-date on the goings-on within our communities. Especially, with the current times we are all experiencing, we want to keep you informed of all things local.

I am happy to provide you a reduced rate of \$40.00 for 1 year (normally \$44.00 for 1 year).

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Call and mention "Subscriber Come Back Rate" so we can welcome you correctly with this special price.

Best personal regards,
Lauren S. Barr, Publisher, Editor-In-Chief

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