



FROM THE REMAINS

REFLECTIONS ON *STATION ELEVEN*

EDITED BY ROBIN A. BEDENBAUGH

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Reflections on *Station Eleven*

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Robin A. Bedenbaugh



Newfound Press

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Preface

In fall of 2017, *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel became the talk of the town in Knoxville, Tennessee. Mandel's novel about the collapse of civilization in the aftermath of a global pandemic was the focus of two community reading programs.

With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the leadership of the Knox County Public Library, Knoxville hosted a Big Read of *Station Eleven*. Community members came together at book discussions, lectures, and workshops to hold conversations on themes that emerged from their common reading of Mandel's novel. Likewise, the University of Tennessee selected *Station Eleven* as the Life of the Mind reading for first-year students arriving on campus that fall.

From the Remains: Reflections on "Station Eleven," a project of the University of Tennessee Libraries' marketing and communications team, gathers creative responses—both written and artistic—that emerged from local study and discussion of the novel.

The university's First-Year Studies Office put us in touch with students enrolled in First-Year Studies 100, and those students allowed us to publish the essays and artworks they created for their first college assignment. The assigned reading prompted self-reflection and some hard thinking about what students hoped to gain from college. There's wisdom here—and amazing creativity! The student

creations reprinted here include song lyrics, a poem, a musical composition, and an epistolary essay. The students' artworks that illustrate this volume are outstanding. Many of the artworks are paired with an extract from the artist's narrative interpretation of his or her work.

Authors who answered our public call for submissions approached the novel from widely varying perspectives. Dr. Mark Rasnake explains the mechanisms of an infectious disease outbreak and warns that a pandemic could trigger a societal collapse. According to Kevin Krahenbuhl, the way our minds work and the current state of our culture, taken together, point to a slow, bleak return to civilization following a worldwide catastrophe. Angela Allred—ordinarily an avid fan of post-apocalyptic novels—offers the humorous response of a reader who found *Station Eleven* too dismal even for her literary tastes. Computer science professor Bruce MacLennan suggests that some consumer electronics would survive an apocalypse and might help us recover fragments of lost knowledge. Recovering *meaning* and *wisdom*, he contends, will be the real challenge.

The editor wishes to thank Stella Bridgeman-Prince, Heather Davis, and staff at the First-Year Studies Office at the University of Tennessee for helping us assemble student essays and artworks for this volume.

We couldn't be more pleased with the contributions of our authors and artists! Read and enjoy.

ROBIN A. BEDENBAUGH



Ashley Beckman—“My artwork depicts a stylized, derelict cityscape with a bright red path through the middle. . . . The red bridge represents the enjoyable aspects of life. They run throughout the ‘survival tasks’ and provide some respite from the day-to-day activities. . . . These aspects must be balanced correctly, which is why it is depicted as a bridge.”

Sans Soleil

Arthur Smith

Once in the future, in an underground cramped city
Below the frozen one that used to be Toronto, I found
Myself walking through nurseries drizzling
With ferns and banks of pink azaleas.
There were mortuaries and mute
White camellias for a hearse. There were hearses.
There were bodegas, and strawberries
Overnighted from New Zealand.
I bought a dozen vanilla bean pods
Stoppered in a slender glass bottle,
My nose hooked in Madagascar.
There was more than one pet store overrun with parrots,
Like beach apartments for the festive insane. I watched
A young black woman beat her teenaged son
With the shoe she had just then stooped
To step out of. Every one slowed and circled.

Other voices walked by in Chinese, in what sounded
Like Portuguese, something Swedish. The boy
Was taller and outweighed her. He covered his ears
And the back of his head and took every blow
She had in her. The mother's rage at all of us watching,
The boy's acquiescence to whatever you want
To call this, the Arctic eating any hope
Of life above the surface. What can you do? This is the way
The world is going to work. Down here, everything occurs
In the present, now, which happens over and over
Because that's all we have.
She is berating him in French. You can tell
By the sound it has a wooden sole.

Reprinted with permission of the author. Originally published in
The Fortunate Era: Poems, Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2013.

“Whenever a phone is found, on a nightstand,
in a car, or in the hip pocket of a corpse,
the adventure will begin. What does it
contain? Trivialities or treasures?”



Shelly O'Barr

What Wisdom Lies Within?

Bruce J. MacLennan

I work on artificial intelligence and unconventional computing technologies, such as quantum computing. After reading *Station Eleven*, my immediate thought was: after the collapse, when the power grid goes down for good, my occupation will cease to exist. Moreover, few of my computer science skills would be relevant to the immediate demands of survival or to the eventual rebuilding of civilization. On reflection, however, I realized that computing technology would survive and even increase in value. The hint is in *Station Eleven* itself, where we read of an inventor in Traverse City running a laptop off a bicycle-powered generator.

Although the Internet will be gone, many smartphones and other small computing devices will survive, and they will be more useful than the book implies. When it is important to do so, they will be recharged from gasoline generators, so long as there is fuel to burn. Solar-powered rechargers will become very valuable and might be looted from stores and warehouses. Over the years, as the lithium batteries wear out, they can be replaced with new ones from abandoned warehouses. Even in the absence of manufactured batteries, we will be able power our devices, for it's not hard to make a crude battery sufficient to power a phone.

Why go to all this trouble? Even without the Internet, smartphones will be valuable. They have flashlights. They have cameras. They have

GPS, which remarkably will continue to function (but gradually lose accuracy as satellite and receiver clocks drift). In some cases, phones will contain cached maps and other useful information, and they can be used also to photograph rare or fragile documents useful for survival and rebuilding civilization.

Each phone will be precious as a time capsule of the antediluvian world, a snapshot of its owner's life in the last weeks before the collapse: desperate final text messages and emails, videos of the accelerating chaos, cached news reports. Much of this will be ephemeral, of value only to the owner or as a reminder of the past—nostalgic remnants of a lost world. (Put your phone in airplane mode and see what is in it now.) Some phones, however, will be treasure troves, containing precious works of literature, art, and music. Ebook readers will be mini portable libraries. Some phones will contain information that's actually useful for survival and for building the new world, but I expect they will be the exceptions.

Since USB flash drives and SD cards are tough and plentiful, many will survive and be used for transferring and storing data. I expect a healthy trade in these receptacles for valuable information. Amazingly, Bluetooth will continue to work, allowing devices to exchange data over short distances. Some apps will also be precious items to share, so long as they work without the Internet. Unfortunately computer viruses and other forms of malware will continue to be a threat, spreading more slowly than the Georgia flu—but disturbingly parallel to it.

Whenever a phone is found, on a nightstand, in a car, or in the hip pocket of a corpse, the adventure will begin. What does it contain? Trivialities or treasures? Can it be recharged? Is it locked? Can it be hacked? Those who have the necessary skills will be sought after; they will deserve to be called “wizards.”

Smartphones and tablets are pretty tough and should last for a long time if treated with care. Repairing them, of course, will be impossible, except for replacing a battery or a broken screen (and these only so long as replacement parts can be salvaged). It will be a long, long time before new semiconductor chips can be manufactured. Each loss will be permanent. I imagine smartphones will be viewed like the alethiometers in *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman—precious artifacts, marvelous devices that can never be created again, repositories of truth to the wizards who know the arcane secrets for consulting them, almost magical tools of wonder in a newly medieval world.

The time has come when each must do his
own work of redemption. Mankind has
grown older and a new month has begun.

—Carl Jung, *The Red Book*

The loss of computing technology will be a loss of information and communication. Much more serious will be the loss of collective human wisdom and connection. Once Maslow's basic and safety needs are satisfied, people will wonder again about the meaning of life and the significance of what has happened to their world. Institutions that traditionally have addressed these concerns, such as churches, will no longer exist, and self-appointed messiahs, such as Prophet Tyler, will fill the vacuum. As *Station Eleven* shows, they are destructive to their followers and dangerous to outsiders. Therefore people will be thrown back upon their native psychological resources and their inborn sources of meaning. What are they?

For most of the two hundred thousand or so years since modern humans emerged in Africa, we have been foragers living in nomadic

groups of several dozen, occasionally and warily encountering other such groups. This is the environment in which we evolved and to which our brains are adapted. This is also the situation in which most people will live for the first few years after the collapse. Since they will be aware of the possibility of agriculture, however, it will be only a few years before the survivors begin to settle down with livestock and crops. So also basic industrialization will begin again, building on the remnants from the old world.

Humans have had agriculture and cities for five hundred generations. But for at least ten thousand generations before that (and arguably for at least a hundred thousand as premodern hominins) we were nomadic foragers. Evolution moves slowly, and civilization is a veneer that has not penetrated deep into our DNA. Therefore, our evolved psychological structures are adapted to the environment that produced us: foraging in small bands. This is the root of the archetypal psychological structures that regulate our lives and that are the foundations of meaning and significance for human beings. The function of these unconscious archetypes is to govern perception, motivation, affect, and behavior to achieve biological ends. They represent what it has meant, in an evolutionary sense, to be a human being and to live a human life.

The archetypes are familiar from many myths and folktales because they are residents of our psyches: clever maidens, wise old men, powerful witches, tricksters, magicians, heroes, nurturing mothers, evil sorcerers, dangerous strangers, and the many gods, goddesses, and nature spirits. After the collapse, people will be thrown back on their own archetypal resources to find meaning, inspiration, and guidance. Often they will project these archetypes onto other people, and sometimes they will be possessed by archetypally engendered complexes in their own unconscious minds. Thus are prophets born and thus their followers bewitched.

When people don't recognize the archetypes as residents of their own psyches, they project them outward, either onto other people or into the heavens as gods. Given the absence of established institutional religion after the collapse, I hope that people would learn that wisdom comes from contacting the gods within. Part and parcel of this insight is the humility to recognize that everyone has this access if they seek it; each can be the prophet of their own religion. That is the humility lacking in Prophet Tyler.

The archetypes embody the evolutionary wisdom of humankind, but they function as autonomous subpersonalities and have their own agendas. They served us well for two hundred thousand years but might not be so well adapted to the present. There is no guarantee that they will conform to contemporary ethics, nor should they be blindly obeyed. On the other hand, ignoring or repressing the archetypes' needs and demands can harm mental health, and we will forfeit the gifts they have to offer. Therefore we should engage with these archetypal figures.

To tap into these wellsprings of meaning, creativity, and guidance, post-collapse survivors will need to learn to access the archetypal figures in their own unconscious minds and to negotiate with them. This inward journey can be accomplished by techniques from analytical psychology, such as active imagination, but also by contemplative and meditative practices from the world's religious and spiritual traditions. After the collapse everyone will need to become a visionary, or they will become the blind followers of other people's visions.

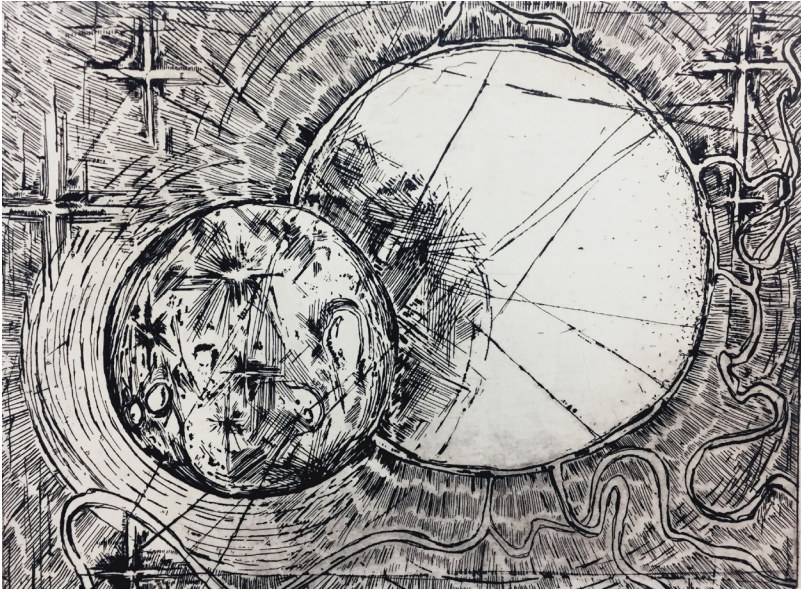
The archetypes are shared by all people; that is the unconscious connection that binds us into a common humanity. But each of us has a unique perspective on the archetypes, filtered through our individual psyches, conditioned by personal experience and psychological development. Therefore no one has privileged access to the naked Truth, and it is essential to recognize this ineradicable

subjectivity. Widespread understanding that these personal revelations are symbolic, like dreams, should discourage literal interpretation and blind acceptance by others. When everyone is a prophet of their own religion, with no presumption of superiority, then people can discuss their insights, not as a means of founding cults to exert power over others but as a means of making meaning together. From this will emerge a new understanding of the ways to live a human life grounded in our common humanity but respecting each person's unique individuality.

Knowing that wisdom lies within and knowing the means to access it will help humanity to survive and thrive after the collapse—but why wait for a pandemic?

I give you news of the way of *this* man, but
not of your own way. My path is not your
path, therefore I cannot teach you. The way
is within us. . . . Within us is the way, the
truth, and the life. . . . So live yourselves.

—Carl Jung, *The Red Book*



Elizabeth Ford—“Picture in your mind outer space; the endless Milky Way and dazzling starry sky. To our eye, to our knowledge, the galaxy is there, vast, seemingly still and vacant. . . . Space is like survival, it is always there; it is just how we choose to view it that matters.”

“We are fortunate to have many horrific futures
to choose from in our literature.”

What Will I Do in the Coming Dystopia?

Brooks Clark

Back when I was first reading *Station Eleven*, I commented to a colleague that it reminded me of *The Road*. In my superficial reading of things, they both depicted people on a journey in a world in which everything had collapsed. My colleague correctly noted that *Station Eleven* was nothing like *The Road*, that it had a completely different theme and message. I believe she meant that the former had a message of optimism and preservation of culture, while the latter was simply about survival in a world in which nature itself has failed to function. At the end of *Station Eleven*, they see lights in the distance, indicating that someone has started up a power plant. At the end of *The Road*, I believe there is a sense that a small cadre of people will restart humanity, assuming the sun will shine through the clouds at some point and start photosynthesis.

When Emily St. John Mandel came to speak, my friends and I were struck most of all by the revelation that she writes walking on a treadmill for six hours each day while her child is at day care. I was also pleased to hear that, when she conceived *Station Eleven*, she made a conscious effort to make it unlike *The Road*. (It was a Jefferson County High School AP English student who asked the question about the dueling dystopiae. Good for him.)

We at UT had experienced another fable of collapsed civilization with the Clarence Brown Theatre's production of *Mr. Burns*,

A Post-Electric Play. Instead of Shakespeare, the survivors of this apocalypse retell, as best they can, old episodes of *The Simpsons* by their campfires. Like the stories and myths handed down in previous oral traditions, their themes and characters change over the years to become something different.

We in 21st-century America cannot recite Homer the way the ancient Greeks could or tell our country's history the way the griots of West Africa did. I can recite "The Cremation of Sam McGee" only to the first two verses. I can, however, recite Lee Strasberg's "This is the business we've chosen" speech, as Hyman Roth, from *The Godfather*. When our civilization ends, we will probably be able to recount the saga of the Corleone family better than our own history.

We are fortunate to have many horrific futures to choose from in our literature. *The Hunger Games* series has a particular resonance for our times, in that it shows an aristocracy living off the sweat of the serfs in a neo-feudal police state. *Soylent Green* had a similar resonance in the years before environmental awareness. *Mad Max* and its ilk appeal to me less, since they seem less rooted in our realities. But they share with *Station Eleven* the notion that, in a vacuum, leadership will be grabbed by evil people. This starts us thinking about cults and other instances in which we see this now and throughout history. In this sense, these futures share more than we'd like to think with our present and past.

Perhaps the most heart-warming part about *Station Eleven* is that it shows the things that persist, like the people who are the burnt novels in *Fahrenheit 451*. In *Station Eleven*, some of the things that persist are random, like the graphic novel. But the traveling players are deliberately preserving the beautiful art as something worth doing in the face of a collapsed world—in fact, the only thing worth doing in a collapsed world.

What will I take with me into the empty, dystopian world that awaits us, say, after a pandemic, or environmental collapse, or nuclear winter? Music is the way we can truly remember things. I am conversant with the canon of rock 'n' roll dominated by Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, and the Beatles. I'll take that canon with me, sure, along with a healthy selection of show tunes, Kingston Trio folks songs, and "La Marseillaise" (because of *Casablanca*).

Now that I think of it, I could probably recite all the parts of *Casablanca* the way the players in *Station Eleven* do Shakespeare. For me, that would be something worth doing, along with saying, "That kid's name was Moe Green, and the city he invented was Las Vegas. This was a great man—a man of vision and guts. And there isn't even a plaque—or a signpost—or a statue of him in that town! Someone put a bullet through his eye. No one knows who gave the order—when I heard it, I wasn't angry; I knew Moe. I knew he was headstrong, talking loud, saying stupid things. So, when he turned up dead, I let it go. And I said to myself, this is the business we've chosen."

Survival

"Survival is Insufficient " Station Eleven

Mallory Vatter

♩ = 140

Piano

Cello

dim.

9

Pno.

Vc.

cresc.

dim.

17

Pno.

Vc.

dim.

22

Pno.

Vc.

cresc.

dim.

26

Pno.

Vc.

cresc.

30

Pno.

Vc.

cresc.

dim.

33

Pno.

Vc.

dim.

Mallory Vatter—“I kept asking myself what kind of music would be playing in certain scenes if *Station Eleven* was a movie. . . . The change of melody is meant to represent the need to not just survive, but to live. . . .”

“How?! IN THE WORLD?!” I exclaimed to my husband, who looked tiredly up from his video game, “did this book get nominated for the National Book Award?!”

I'm not going and you can't make me!
(One "Adult's" Response to *Station Eleven*)

Angela Allred

Reviews of *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel:

“ What a phenomenal writer. I think she is a lot better than me. I mean, like, a lot better. I'm kind of embarrassed to call myself an author at this point. ”

—J.K. Rowling, world renowned novelist,
screenwriter and producer best known for
writing the Harry Potter fantasy series

“ If I could just live inside Emily's brain for one day, I feel like I could die a happy person. ”

—Neil deGrasse Tyson, American astrophysicist,
author, and director of the Hayden Planetarium

“ *Station Eleven* is going to be uge. U U U UGE I tell you. Emily is probably the only person in the world who is almost as smart as me. ”

—Donald Trump

“ I felt an emotion I didn’t know I had inside me. Ms. Mandel stirred, basted, and brewed feelings inside me until out of the oven came a brand-new emotion. I am calling this new emotion Emily—after the author, of course. ”

—Oprah Winfrey, American media proprietor, talk show host, actress, producer, philanthropist, and all-around regarded as everyone’s favorite person in the world

“ Ms. Mandel’s *Station Eleven* is the work of a true GENIUS. Look to her for guidance after I’m gone. ”

—Last words spoken by Stephen Hawking (January 8, 1942–March 14, 2018), English theoretical physicist, cosmologist, author, and director of research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at the University of Cambridge

“ I hated it. ” —Me

...

The fictitious reviews are my interpretation of my feelings listening to an esteemed group of women discuss *Station Eleven*.

Let me begin by saying I am not normally a trouble-maker. So, sitting in a small room full of women whom I personally regard as smarter, more articulate, and definitely more versed in literature than me and having a drastically different opinion than all of them was, well, a bit intimidating.

We were there in a small room on an obscure floor (obscure because I don’t remember which floor) in the library in downtown Knoxville on a sunny afternoon to discuss our feelings and thoughts about this book that was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Bailey’s Women’s Prize for Fiction award, and (perhaps most notably and what had brought me to this room) a finalist for the National Book

Award. We were all part of a campaign to encourage Knoxvilleans to read, discuss, and learn together through the reading of the same piece of literature (an effort to which I cannot speak highly enough). I was included because I would be moderating a panel on the book at a later date with a group of “subject matter experts.”

But let's rewind to a few weeks previous.

“How?! IN THE WORLD?!” I exclaimed to my husband, who looked tiredly up from his video game, “did this book get nominated for the National Book Award?!”

No wait, a few weeks earlier than that.

“Would you like to moderate a discussion based on a post-apocalyptic book?” I was asked by my coworker who had been asked to serve on same said panel.

“DO I?!!!” It was near to impossible to contain my excitement, so I didn't. “I LOVE POST-APOCALYPTIC BOOKS!!” I exclaimed!

“Yes, I know,” she said, “that's why I recommended you.”

“BUT I STILL NEED TO EXPLAIN TO YOU THAT I AM SUPER HAPPY! ALL I DO IS READ THESE BOOKS, AND NOW I GET TO DO IT FOR MY JOB?!”

Unfortunately for her, it went on like this for a bit.

After she got me back to sounding respectfully calm, we went into a small meeting with two of the people who would serve on the panel and the librarian representative who was organizing it. She gave me a FREE COPY of said book. I suddenly became a kid again—so excited to be getting a book of my very own. (I was that kid in school who was jumping out of my seat on that day when those books you ordered from that little paper magazine arrived.) And this

day was no different. It was book day at work! I couldn't believe my good luck!

Unfortunately for the others in the room, their luck was fading fast because they were getting tired of listening to me gush about my excitement.

"Yes, we heard you enjoy the Post-Apocalyptic Genre," the representative said.

"DO I?!!! I just finished a 10-book series, and before that an 8-book series, and before that . . ." And on it went.

"Oh, will you look at the time!" she said.

Forcing myself to leave, I immediately went home to torture my husband with my leftover enthusiasm.

"So, you have to read a book and moderate a panel about it? What are you excited about, again?"

"No, I don't HAVE to read it. I GET to read it! And it's not just ANY book! It's a post-apocalyptic book, my favorite genre AND it won book awards, so it's probably super awesome! AND I get to moderate a panel about it!"

"Well that's great, honey."

Or, well, I'm sure that's what he said anyway. I remember hearing him saying something as I melted into the couch to lose myself in fantasyland.

What's that thing people say about not getting your expectations up too high? It is at least a teensy bit possible I had my expectations a wee bit high. Yeah, ok, like no-book-could-possibly-live-up-to-them high. I will give you that. Either way, within a few hours they all came crashing down. I was probably about a third of the way into what

was going to be—by all outward award-winning appearances—the best post-apocalyptic book I had ever read. But as each page turned I became more and more frustrated. I finally put the book down in a huff.

“How?! IN THE WORLD?!” I exclaimed.

My husband looked tiredly up from his video game.

“... did this book get nominated for the National Book Award?!”

(Notice we are now back to the first fast forward? [Or is that a flashback?] Either way, see what a great writer I am?)

He is looking over at me with that do-I-really-need-to-start-paying-attention-or-is-she-done look.

Definitely not done: “It’s like somehow the author has managed to take a stressful and potentially sad circumstance and turn it into straight-up depression. No other apocalyptic book is this depressing. It’s like she just took all the reds and blacks and yellows in life and turned them all grey. Everything is grey. Just dirty, bland, and grey. It’s awful, and—might I add—VERY unrealistic.”

He slowly lowered his controller, resigning himself to the thought that he might not beat the Draylord Dragon of Master Fronds tonight after all.

I didn’t HEAR him ask for details, but I’m sure he meant to.

“Where do I begin?! Everyone at ONE particular airport survives? Really? Really. Everyone who flies in from who-knows-where are either ALL immune or NOT EXPOSED to the virus that is wiping out 90 percent of the population? Really? Airports are filled with germs! Airplanes and airports are, literally (and I DO actually mean LITERALLY here), one of the MOST likely places that a virus would spread the fastest.”

He tries the sympathetic nod.

“An isolated community might avoid a disease like this—but EVERYONE at an AIRPORT?! Not happening.”

Terry gets a beer from the fridge. This is going to be a long one, he is starting to realize.

“Don’t even get me started about people not establishing ANY electricity for 20 years. Twenty years?! This is absolutely absurd. Did all the smart people die? Was this a book about a virus that killed every person who is capable of going to a library and learning about getting power generated from dams and other sources? Or did the virus wipe out all the libraries too? Because, from the looks of things, every bit of knowledge left with the virus.”

Terry took a drink and cast a forlorn look at his paused video game.

“I mean, right after food and water supply has been established, electricity would be the next priority. Yeah, some towns will take longer to get it going than others. But even in the slowest places, everyone should have some form of electricity up within a couple of years. Hell, there are TV shows where they simulate an apocalyptic scenario that wipes out everyone except a few people. And they put them in a location with no power or clean water, but the people have access to building materials, and within hours the group had power and water. And in that show, these people don’t even have access to a library!”

“And, no, before you ask, I don’t think I’m being overly optimistic here. I have read a ton on this topic at this point, and there hasn’t been any author who studied this who doesn’t put power back into the equation within two years, even when it hurts the storyline (because what’s really interesting about people living *with* electricity?).”

“It’s like she did absolutely zero research before writing this book. I mean, truly. Zero research.”

“And the drama level is sky high. There is some dude who basically regrets his entire life. But she can’t just say this dude has some regrets; she layers and layers it with heaviness. Listen to this, ‘He found he was a man who repented almost everything, regrets crowding in around him like moths to a light. This was actually the main difference between twenty-one and fifty-one, he decided, the sheer volume of regret.’ Reading this is like listening to nothing but sad songs for hours on end. Of course you are going to be sad if you sit around regretting stuff all the time. I mean every other line is like this. It has to be one of the heaviest, most depressing books I’ve ever picked up. Man, I sure hope people who read this don’t think this whole genre is this depressing.”

I finally stopped.

Terry mentally woke up and said, “Sounds like a terrible book. Why not just stop reading it?”

“I can’t—I am reading it for work, remember? I am moderating a panel where the book will be discussed.”

“Oh, right.”

I couldn’t think of anything else to say. “Well, I guess that’s all.”

I could tell he was skeptical as he slowly reached for his controller and pressed the power button.

I continued reading, every so often letting out exaggerated groaning noises as yet another unrealistic or depressing event took place.

For weeks after finishing the book, I felt the need to express how I felt about *Station Eleven* with coworkers and others who had roughly

the same interest level as my husband. People started walking the other way when they saw me coming.

Now, double-triple flashback (or would that be a fast forward at this point?) to the meeting at the library (or is it a backward flashback?) with some of the smartest, most well-read women I have probably ever been in the same room with. Women who would never end a sentence with a preposition. Or write a sentence fragment.

The leader had started the meeting by going over the “rules” of discussing the book. I don’t have them here, but a rough summary of the rules was basically to restrain from saying such conversation-ending things as “I liked it” or “I didn’t like it.” But, even with these rules, you could kind of tell how people felt about it because of the amount of positive versus negative comments made. And it became pretty clear that everyone got a lot more out of the book than I. In fact, I would go so far as to say that, for some, it affected them deeply (or is it effected?). And, as I sat listening to each woman, noting that this book may have profoundly changed them—some speaking of realizing how much they take for granted like cell phones, electricity, and living in a civil society, and others discussing how the author’s take on hard issues such as regret and love helped them realize things they had not thought before—suddenly my complaints about the book seemed, well, perhaps less important than they had previously. I mean, the only change I noticed in my life was my coworkers running the other way while a grey cloud followed behind me like a Pig-Pen cloud of dust. But, for these ladies, it opened their eyes and their hearts to the things they take for granted. It helped them taste clean water with a new appreciation or savor a banana like it was the first time they had tried it. It helped them see how almost everything we do day-to-day could be gone in a flash if given the right set of disaster ingredients.

As they spoke, my feelings slowly began turning from disdain for the book and more toward interest in this room of ladies who had gotten so much out of it.

I'm just kidding.

That's how mature I WISH I were. Here's how it actually went down.

I was aghast.

I wanted to throw a tantrum, bang my hands on the table, and demand, **"WHAT?! No one else hated this book but me?!"**

Deep down (well, not that far down), the child inside me was just hoping someone would say anything resembling something negative. I know this sounds really immature. Who are we kidding? It **was** immature. (It's also possible all this bolding and CAPS and exclamation marks are immature, too.) But **COME ON!** No one disliked this book but me?! I would have taken even a subtle dislike. Perhaps even a comment as subtle as, "Her use of juxtaposing the analepsis with the anagnorisis captivated my imagination, but I would like to have seen a bit more character development on the antagonist, and there were a few times when the gross amplification of the loss of communication felt almost didactic in nature." (Yes, I Googled "literary terms" to come up with that sentence. And, no, I have no idea what I'm saying. And also, no, nobody actually sounded anything like that. I'm just being a baby again.)

Sure, I would have had no idea what they were saying if they had said that sentence. But, if they had said something like that I would have understood that something, somewhere in the book was displeasing to them. But, alas, it was not to be. Each person, in their way, praised the book, some with literary terms, some with

expressions of how it had effected (affected?) their lives. And there were plenty of nods and notes of agreeable “mmmhmm’s” to go with it. (I’d like to stop to also say that my whole memory of this could be off. It seems likely that they offered some type of criticism and that my baby-brain just wanted less positive, more criticisms. But who knows—that was months ago, so we are just going to have to agree to remember it my way.)

Up until this point I had remained quiet. This was a “speak as you feel led” type of meeting. And, since I was just sitting there waiting to “hop on” the first negative comment that was said, that left me with nothing to say. I guess it became obvious that I had remained quiet, because someone asked what my thoughts were.

And this . . . well, this is where you can be proud. Well, I’m hoping you’ll be proud anyway.

I actually followed the “don’t just say you don’t like it” rule, and I probably even started with something nice (I have no memory of saying something positive, but I’d like to think I did, and, since I’m telling the story, let’s just go with it). I then explained the problems I had with the book, especially concerning the lack of research I felt the author had done to write it and the depressing tone of the story. I worked HARD to push down the screaming, petulant child inside of me. I mean I worked HARD. Part of me wanted to say things like, “There are so many good post-apocalyptic books out there, but this isn’t one of them!” or “Waaaaaaa! Me hate it!” But I stayed calm (or I think I seemed calm anyway). It may have been obvious from the amount of criticisms I made that “I didn’t like it,” but I followed the rules and never once spoke those words. In hindsight, those rules are really important because they force you to articulate your problems instead of doing this (which is what I wanted to do):



(You will be glad to know I used an “able to use commercially” image to create this meme!)

Everyone was polite and receptive to my criticisms, which just goes to show yet again how much more mature and wonderful these women are than me—although I would love to know if, on the inside, they were screaming “I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU DIDN’T LIKE THIS BOOK, YOU NINCOMPOOP!” I’d like to think so, because that would at least make me feel better about my childish reaction.

I wanted to be a whining, complaining child about it, but the atmosphere in the room was not conducive to such a tantrum. And honestly, even if I had done that, I know they would have done the rational thing and made me express “in words” what I didn’t like about it. So, for the moment I suppressed that child inside. But, as soon as I saw that invitation to contribute an essay about this book, the child inside me demanded to be heard. This is why you are now

reading this. Because I'm letting that child have her tantrum. Sorry. I hope that's ok.

So, now that you truly know what my "child inside" really thinks about *Station Eleven*, if you would like to discuss any difference of opinions we may have, I think I'm ready to do that now. But I will warn you: the first thing I'm going to do is put my hands over my ears and sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" loudly, over and over. So just know that, going into it.

But more important than our difference of opinion is that I came away from this experience by learning, first, how immature I really am and, secondly, how great it is that the library does this. It forced me to be a grownup and "learn to express my feelings." And it gets people reading something longer than a meme (but memes are awesome, are they not?).

So, thank you to the library for this unique experience in life, and thank you for making me more of a grownup than I wanted to be about it. I hope I can take this lesson into other parts of my life. My husband and coworkers also probably wish I would take this experience into other parts of my life.

And, as this interesting experience comes to an end with the publishing of this book of essays, I'd just like to say,

“ We traveled so far and your friendship meant everything.
It was very difficult, but there were moments of beauty.
Everything ends. I am not afraid. ”

—Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*

Or, in layman's terms,

“ I'm not going and you can't make me! ” —Me



Niki Wolf

“Clearly, the influenza virus in Mandel’s novel was far beyond even the most pessimistic influenza scenarios.

That is the good news. The bad news is that a newly emerging influenza virus doesn’t have to be that lethal in order to be a threat to global stability.”

A Pandemic Ensues

Mark Rasnake

We've become so used to the idea of the flu—
it seems almost like the common cold to us,
doesn't it?—that no one but the historians
seems to know that a hundred years ago it
didn't exist.

—Stephen King, *The Stand*

There is a troubling familiarity we have developed with influenza. It returns every year during the winter months, inflicting misery and a fair amount of death. In a good year, it *only* kills a few thousand, but in a bad year the toll can be thirty to fifty thousand. Schools are canceled, businesses are disrupted, and up to a fifth of the population endures a week of coughing, body aches, and fevers.

Flu season fades away as the first flowers of spring emerge and is quickly put out of our minds. The virus constantly changes though—antigenic drift it's called—taking on a form against which our immune system provides only weak protection. And the next season the altered virus strikes again. From time to time an influenza virus emerges that carries a drastic change in composition—an antigenic shift—and our immune system is unprepared. A pandemic ensues, sickening over half the population—and with greater lethality.

It has been a century since the Spanish Influenza pandemic swept the world, killing hundreds of thousands of Americans, more than died in World Wars I and II combined. It is fitting that Emily St. John Mandel, like Stephen King before her in his novel *The Stand*, chose this illness as the global killer in her novel *Station Eleven*.

The degree to which infectious diseases can cause devastation depends on three variables: rate of progression, level of contagion, and mortality. The influenza pandemic detailed in Mandel's novel raged with greater speed, contagion, and lethality than any documented infectious disease outbreak.

In the novel, people fell ill within a few hours of exposure and died shortly thereafter. Fortunately, such a short time between exposure and first symptoms isn't biologically plausible. The actual incubation period of influenza is still quite short compared to most infections, taking only 1–2 days from exposure until the first symptoms develop. Such speed makes efforts to contain and control influenza outbreaks challenging.

Contagiousness is another matter, and the fictional Georgia Flu in *Station Eleven* sickened nearly the entire population. The actual attack rate of influenza can be nearly as high, and in the 1918 pandemic well over half the population fell ill with that strain.

Lethality, the final variable, was virtually 100 percent in the novel. Thus far the worst pandemic on record, the 1918 Spanish Flu, had a mortality rate of only a few percent. However, influenza viruses are capable of alarmingly high mortality rates—recent outbreaks of avian influenza, for instance, have killed over half of those infected. Fortunately, these highly lethal avian viruses have not spread effectively from person to person, keeping outbreaks at bay.

Clearly, the influenza virus in Mandel's novel was far beyond even the most pessimistic influenza scenarios. That is the good news. The bad news is that a newly emerging influenza virus doesn't

have to be that lethal in order to be a threat to global stability. A severe pandemic not much worse than the 1918 virus could trigger cascading events that would imperil multiple aspects of our modern society, potentially leading to many deaths from causes other than the virus itself.

The availability of healthcare during a severe pandemic is a primary concern. Currently, a severe seasonal influenza outbreak or a mild pandemic such as was seen in 2009 can strain healthcare resources. That year the city of Knoxville, along with many other areas of the country, faced a shortage of critical care beds capable of providing ventilator support to patients with respiratory failure. During the most recent flu season many facilities were forced to cancel elective surgeries due to capacity issues.

Simple public health measures like school closures can cause hospitals to lose much of their workforce due to unexpected child-care needs, further straining the system. Additionally, healthcare workers themselves are likely to be among the first victims of a new influenza strain that has no available vaccine to provide protection.

Few citizens of developed countries have dealt with scarcity and rationing. How will the population react if hospitals close their doors to patients? What will happen to those with life threatening injuries, heart attacks, or strokes, or those in need of maternity services, when no one is available to provide care? During the 2014 Ebola epidemic, many in affected areas died of unrelated illnesses amenable to medical care simply because basic healthcare services were unavailable.

Beyond the direct toll due to illness, the fear and irrational behavior triggered by a widespread contagious disease with a mortality rate of even 5 percent would be tremendous. Modern technology has given us powerful tools with which to combat infectious diseases, but it has also provided the 24/7 news cycle and social media. The

latter platforms at their best can serve to disseminate critically important information but at their worst can spread falsehoods and panic with greater speed and volume.

The recent experience with the 2014 Ebola epidemic does not offer reassurance. A grand total of two cases of Ebola were contracted by US citizens caring for Ebola patients in US hospitals, yet the Ebola Panic raged unabated on cable news and the internet for months. Even-handed appraisals of risk were often drowned out by sensational news coverage and retweeted, shared, and forwarded falsehoods.

It is difficult to imagine the public reaction to a pandemic with a US death toll exceeding a million, and tens of millions more severely ill. Fear of contagion is hardwired into the human psyche. Will those who remain healthy continue to produce our food, electricity, and all the other necessities of life in the face of another great plague? Or will they (as Jeevan did in *Station Eleven*) barricade themselves indoors, hoping the epidemic passes over? If too many in critical industries abandon their jobs, how will the rest of the population react when the store shelves empty and the lights go out?

In his classic documentary *Connections*, science historian James Burke described us as living in a “technology trap,” warning that the collapse of an essential function such as the electrical grid would trigger a cascading series of failures in other critical areas. The ensuing chaos, starvation, and violence would wreak havoc far beyond any harms resulting from the power failure. Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and even epidemics like Ebola trigger these cascading failures on a local level; but help eventually arrives from undamaged areas to restore order. What happens when, as in a pandemic, there is no unaffected area from which to launch a response?

The 1918 influenza pandemic struck at a time of tremendous national unity, with the entire country accustomed to hardship and

sacrifice in support of the war in Europe. A century later we find ourselves in a far different time—our unity frayed and our leaders and institutions distrusted (and sometimes despised). Will a future pandemic tear us further apart? Or will the “better angels of our nature” envisioned by Abraham Lincoln pull us closer together in the face of crisis? *Station Eleven* depicts a world where the better angels eventually prevail, albeit many years after a period of terrible chaos.

Compared with the physicians and public health officials of 1918, we are far better prepared to combat emerging infectious disease threats. We can rapidly detect newly emerging influenza strains. We have stockpiles of antiviral medications. Our medical infrastructure overall is far more robust. Planning, preparedness, and disease surveillance activities are ongoing. We can’t prevent influenza outbreaks, even with seasonal influenza viruses for which we have vaccines (albeit ones with limited effectiveness).

We need to change that. Our complacency with influenza has no doubt been a barrier to developing highly effective vaccines and a wider selection of antiviral medications. More effort is needed to remedy this shortfall.

Many will fall ill with the next pandemic, but a rapid and coordinated global response will save millions of lives. In times of crisis we have choices in how we respond. If we share the idea that “survival is insufficient,” our choices will, hopefully, be the right ones.

“Given what we know about how the mind works, there is every reason to believe that a societal collapse would be just as catastrophic as depicted in the popular post-apocalyptic literature.”



Brianna Szurpicki—“In my painting, the primary color is green, to represent the overwhelming illness that covered the nation. As much as one would want to close their eyes and go blind so that they wouldn’t have to see the horrible state of the suffering world, they must keep their eyes open for survival, because the minute one closes their eyes, they risk losing everything.”

Cognition and the Collapse of Society

Kevin S. Krahenbuhl

How might a worldwide catastrophe impact society? The question has long captured the popular imagination—note the reading public's appetite for post-apocalyptic novels. The prospects for humankind's future depicted in this literary genre have been the subject of much discussion, but little has been said or written about what learning might look like in this brave new world.

In this short essay, I hope to present a brief summary of key principles of learning and to point out how certain aspects of our current society undermine those principles, putting us in an even more precarious situation should such a catastrophe occur.

General Principles of Learning

Let us begin by laying out some basic principles of learning that remain true whether or not society has collapsed—because all they require are persons, with minds, and things to know. The following six basic principles of learning are true for all people, in all learning contexts. While continued research may further refine subtleties in these principles, they are not likely to change in any significant way. I will later explain the implications of these principles in the event of a societal collapse.

- (1) We learn what we think about.
- (2) We cannot learn well if we are thinking about too much we don't already know.

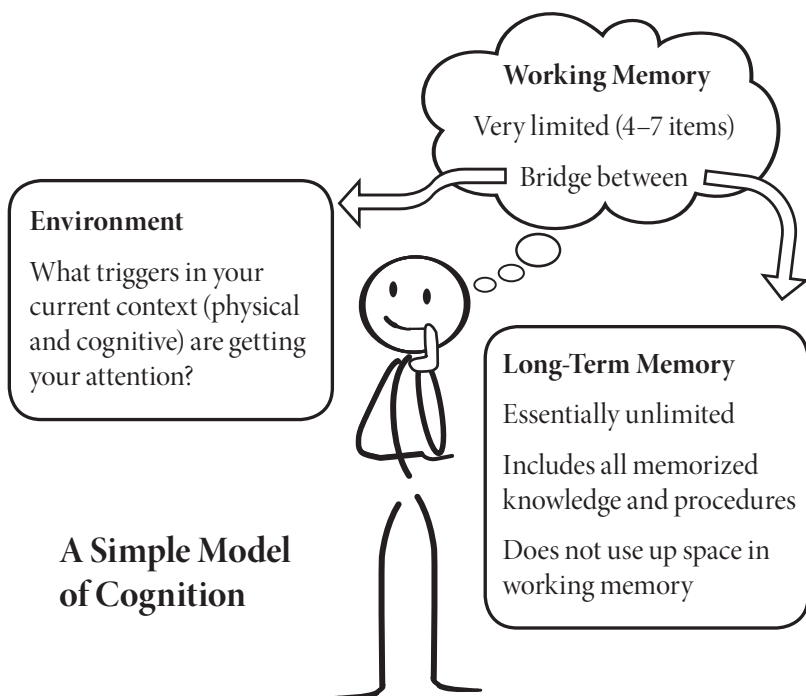
- (3) We learn things through continued, deliberate practice.
- (4) We learn new information built upon what we already know.
- (5) We must have knowledge in place before applying skill.
- (6) We learn differently early in a domain and late.

We learn what we think about. This one seems obvious; and yet, interestingly, this principle is often ignored in many educational environments. Take for instance an instructor who wishes to engage his or her learners in a fun project. If students spend 40 minutes of a 50-minute class session working in groups, in most instances the teacher will not know what students are thinking about. Consequently, the instructor cannot ensure that students absorb the intended lessons. The same is true for students sitting in a lecture hall. Unless the instructor consistently interacts with the class to gauge what they are thinking, he or she cannot ensure they are learning what is hoped. Certainly, in many contemporary educational environments there is inadequate assessment of what learners are actually thinking.

We cannot learn well if we are thinking about too much we do not already know. The way our mind processes information basically entails three elements: working memory, long-term memory, and the environment. The figure, opposite, illustrates how these interact in cognition (the mental process by which knowledge is acquired).

The key point here is that something you have memorized does not use up any space in working memory! This includes knowledge (e.g., the roads to take to get home from work) and procedures (e.g., how to fix a car battery). This principle demonstrates the value of memorizing important information in each knowledge domain—for example, a general timeline of history.

However, since we live in a society best described by “information overload,” both principles (1) and (2) are often challenged. We are



literally bombarded with information, and we can access an overabundance of information with just the touch of a button on a smart device. Because of the ease of access to information many educators have devalued the extended time necessary to think about information in order for us to learn it. This leads us to principle (3) . . .

We learn things through continued, deliberate practice. That is, just because you can look something up, that does not mean you know it. In fact, if you have to look it up, you have clear evidence that you do not know it. In order to learn something, you must practice retrieving that information from your mind—not your device. This learning is best accomplished over a period of time, and learning is enhanced when you are provided feedback by a more knowledgeable mentor.

We learn new information built upon what we already know. This highlights the potential for using assessments of learning to best help each individual learner. After all, each of us enters every educational context with very different experiences and very different bases of knowledge. When it comes to learning, the more you know, the easier it is to learn and know more. Thus we have good reason to encourage students to commit large bodies of knowledge to long-term memory—especially the foundational concepts of each knowledge domain, as they will be utilized again and again.

We must have the knowledge base in place before we start applying the skills appropriately. This is easily illustrated with a perhaps crazy, perhaps salient example. Knowledge of how to use a gun or to make ammunition could be particularly helpful in the event of a societal collapse. However, both would be incredibly dangerous if you lacked the corresponding safety knowledge. The principle applies to traditional educational contexts as well—but, of course, the risks of danger are significantly lower if a kid tries to write a historical argument without proper background knowledge of the historical era and topic!

Principles (4) and (5) are particularly important for schools because there is increasing agreement that most skills we want students to learn are domain-specific. That is, the best way to improve a particular skill is to build up a rich knowledge base in that specific domain. So, if you're new to Chinese history, a knowledge of American history and general historiography does not mean you're ready to transfer in. To move towards expertise, you must invest the time needed to acquire a broad knowledge base in that specific domain.

That leads us to our final principle of learning . . .

We learn differently early in a domain and late in a domain. People often think the best way to learn is to simply to emulate what experts do. However, as Ralph Waldo Emerson is reported to have said, every artist was first an amateur! An expert is someone who holds such a rich knowledge base in a given domain that, bombarded with information, he or she can immediately discern what is relevant and what is not, what is fundamental and what is superficial. Using their knowledge base, experts make reasonable guesses as to what is going on. This is not true for novices, who are distracted by surface-level information. They have significant difficulty distinguishing fundamental from superficial information, and they offer guesses that are wildly off-base. These characteristics, you might notice, make for interesting divergences in best approaches for learning at the various stages of domain expertise. For novices, learning is most influenced by the degree of guidance they are given. Generally, novices need a significant amount of guidance to progressively build knowledge before they can start to explore more independently. The opposite is true for experts. Providing guidance and scaffolds to them is largely unhelpful; unstructured and discovery learning methods are more appropriate.

Implications of These Principles for a Societal Collapse

I hope you have seen immediate opportunities to put these principles into practice. But I want to now examine the implications of these principles for our society should we face a catastrophic collapse. Here are what I believe would be the specific impacts of our six basic principles of learning in the wake of a societal collapse:

(1) *We learn what we think about.*

Most of us fill our time thinking about only what is relevant in the moment and in the present context. Therefore, the vast majority

of people have not acquired the knowledge/skills that would be important in a societal collapse.

- (2) *We cannot learn well if we are thinking about too much we don't already know.*

Because very few people will have a large body of relevant knowledge and skill stored in long-term memory, learning will be slow and difficult during the transition to the new normal.

- (3) *We learn things through continued, deliberate practice.*

Because most of us have access to information, very few of us put in the time needed to actually learn information we will very likely need in such a societal collapse.

- (4) *We learn new information built upon what we already know.*

Because we live in a society that is so “easy” for the average citizen, in a societal collapse there will be significant challenges in reestablishing systems of exchange.

- (5) *We must have knowledge in place before applying skill.*

Very few people have spent time preparing for and/or studying what to do in a societal collapse. Most of us will lack the foundational knowledge we need to make the right decisions and to apply various skills in a societal collapse.

- (6) *We learn differently early in a domain and late.*

In a societal collapse there will be very few people who are experts in the skills/knowledge needed for day-to-day basics. Therefore, we will have a significantly slower learning curve. Most of us will be novices forced to learn through discovery, a less efficient mode of learning.

A quick summary . . . Given what we know about how the mind works, there is every reason to believe that a societal collapse would be just as catastrophic as depicted in the popular post-apocalyptic literature. The overwhelming majority of people living in today's

society do not spend time thinking about, studying, preparing for, and practicing the use of knowledge and skills that would likely be relevant in a societal collapse. So our minds are going to be pressed to the limit, and that will hinder—or slow—the process of learning what we need to learn. Most of us know few if any people with the requisite knowledge and/or skillsets. And, if that day hit, who is to say that we'd all be ready to help each other!

Knowledge is built upon prior knowledge. Since very few of us have any experience with a life resembling what we might encounter in a societal collapse, we would no doubt be particularly hard-pressed. Furthermore, the knowledge of how to reestablish older systems of exchange is simply unknown to most people. If a catastrophic electromagnetic pulse (EMP) were to destroy the power grid, the food supply chain would halt within days and might not resume for perhaps years. How would we go about creating new trade networks? Mostly we'd have to make it up as we went along, and that would not be nearly as efficient as building off what is already known.

We would be in nearly constant violation of the fifth principle (We must have knowledge in place before applying skill). In most cases we would learn by doing—but in many instances we would do so with little to none of the requisite foundational knowledge.

So, I think I've laid out a pretty clear picture—there is plenty of bad news!

What about the good news? Well, if you're reading this perhaps you will be motivated to be one of the few to invest the time to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Or, we can always just go with the hope that it will never happen. Here are three specific recommendations—things that anyone could do that would help to overcome some of the cognitive challenges we would face in such an apocalyptic societal collapse:

(1) *Pick up a survivalist manual to have a hard copy.*

There has always been this or that group predicting that the end of days is near. I take all such claims with a high degree of skepticism. But, given that we are so heavily reliant on technology for our access to information, it would be a wise investment to pick up a hard copy of a few books for the just-in-case of life. If society were to collapse, your phones would likely be rendered useless, and your electronically stored information would soon lose access to power and eventually be inaccessible. You could, of course, go online while there is still time 😊 and print and store hard copies of relevant information.

(2) *Invest the time to learn some basic food growing, water collection, health practices, and home maintenance yourself.*

Here you can take an opportunity to leverage that vast storehouse in your mind that we cognitive scientists refer to as long-term memory. Pick a few skillsets you would not mind learning more about and sign up for some classes in them. Continue to practice using those skills if you want them to be stored in long-term memory. And don't forget that in order to practice effectively you need to retrieve it from your mind repeatedly over a period of time.

(3) *Build a trustworthy network in your local community of people with a diverse range of expertise.*

As I have noted, there is a significant domain-specificity associated with learning. It would be most helpful to establish a network of local people whom you trust and who possess a range of practical skillsets. I could imagine a best-case scenario that includes a medical expert, a handyman, a mechanic, and a few others with experience in livestock and/or growing crops. That would seem like a reasonable base of expertise that would be immediately helpful in the case of a societal collapse.

Conclusion

Clearly, you will have noticed the critical implications of the six basic principles of learning for the challenges we would face in the event of a societal collapse. The authors who depict a major societal collapse and a long path to recovery have very likely hit the mark. Perhaps we all ought to take caution and learn from the “preppers.” Think about the unthinkable and prepare for the worst. Or, we can live as we always have, and, most likely, nothing catastrophic will occur. But you might think of it through an analogy: as health insurance. You pay huge amounts of money every month for health insurance; and, truth be told, most of this is a waste of your money. The reason we pay so much in insurance is to maintain sort of a just-in-case fund. If catastrophic health problems arise, then you’ll have gotten your money’s worth. If, however, you live a generally healthy life, you have wasted huge sums of money.

So, will you give up some of your precious time to build the knowledge base and skillset needed in case there is a societal collapse? Only time will tell.

Survival Is Insufficient

First-Year Studies 100

First-year students entering the University of Tennessee take a required online course over the summer preceding their arrival on campus. First-Year Studies 100 includes reading and discussion of a shared text. This *Life of the Mind* reading unites the first-year class in an act of scholarship and sets the tone for a student's entire college career. *Station Eleven* was the *Life of the Mind* book selection for students arriving on campus in fall 2017. Their first college assignment was to prepare a written or creative response to the novel. Students were instructed to reflect on the motto adopted by the novel's Traveling Symphony, "survival is insufficient," and on the importance of finding purpose and meaning in the work we do to achieve true happiness in our lives. The following essays are some of their responses, as are the artworks seen throughout this book.



Leah Gardner—“Part of the human experience is the need to have meaning, a purpose for being on Earth. . . . There has to be more to life, whether it’s beauty, heartache, art, compassion, freedom, or Shakespeare; there has to be some reason that people work so hard every day to survive.”

Nuha Abdelwahab

*You need to have struggles, and disappointments,
and fears in order to reach some love and wisdom
and understanding for people.*

The phrase “Survival is Insufficient” carried a lot of meaning for the Traveling Symphony, because all they had in the world was one another, and their main goal was not to survive but to cherish the time they had with one another. Survival was not the only thing that was going to prove their strength. Even after the virus had killed a majority of their loved ones, instead of becoming selfish and fending for themselves, they turned their fears of the future into something that could bring them some form of comfort. Kirsten, who had lost everything as a child, channeled her sadness and fear into something that could preserve some form of humanity rather than throw it all away.

“Survival is Insufficient” means a lot to me now that I am beginning to start a new chapter in my life, without the people I trust the most in my life like my family and close friends. Going to the University of Tennessee was originally an easy choice to make, because I had my brother here and I wasn’t too far away from my home. However, as the time began to grow closer, I realized that this was my first time living so far away from my parents, so the first few weeks here were some of the hardest. Rather than let myself fall into hopelessness, I decided that it was my choice to do more than just try and go to class and make good grades. I had to venture out and make friends with people I never thought I would connect with. They carried the same emotions about college as I did, and because of this I made friends who I now cherish. We don’t just survive in order to just get a college degree; we’re also here to find ourselves

and enjoy the moments we have together, no matter how small or big they may seem.

This phrase also relates to my personal life, because—just like everyone else—my family has endured some struggles together that we thought we weren't ever going to get through. However, we do as much as we can to keep each other close and enjoy every second we have with each other as much as we can. Even when I was going through some of the hardest points in my life, I always remembered I was here to do more than just survive. That's why I now cherish the people I surround myself with.

As I'm opening this next chapter in my life, I want to make sure that I can be some type of comfort for someone, because living is just one part of the equation. You need to have struggles, and disappointments, and fears in order to reach some love and wisdom, and understanding for people. Life will never be easy, especially moving by myself to another part of the state, but I take what I can get, and I will make the best of any situation that I'm in. That's why I will take the phrase "Survival is Insufficient" with me, because it means more than what it states.



Emily Chapin—“Survival is a baseline, and to truly live, one must find the things in life that make you *fight* to survive.”

Riley Alexander

*I am going to take more risks in college
and regret none of them.*

What is your purpose? Emily St. John Mandel explores this topic in her novel *Station Eleven*. Within *Station Eleven*, a group called the Traveling Symphony lives by the motto “survival is insufficient.” This motto defines the way they live their life and helps the group have a purpose in their fictional journey, and I (as the reader) am learning how I can apply it to a current dilemma in my life.

The Traveling Symphony resides in a very different world than I do, but they face and have solved a similar problem to one that I am currently dealing with—finding a passion. The Symphony’s motto, “survival is insufficient,” basically means this: living is not worth living unless you have a purpose. To explain, the Symphony spend time surviving in the future catastrophe of a society that Mandel creates, but, if they just spent all their time (for lack of a better word) *surviving*, then the process of finding supplies is not worth it because they have nothing to be passionate about in life. However, the Traveling Symphony has a passion: performance. The group consists of many instrumentalists, performers, actors, and artists that all have found a common interest and a common passion. In a sense, they “fuel” their lives through their passion for performing and keeping the arts of humanity alive. From an individual standpoint, Kirsten finds purpose in searching for different publications of the *Station Eleven* comics. Kirsten’s best friend, August, enjoys looking at the televisions that hopelessly do not work. Nevertheless, he possesses a passion to find them, which in turn drives him at certain moments. In short, the characters throughout the novel all have a motive (a passion) which drives them to survive and to live. Obviously,

this concept of finding a passion does not just apply to this post-apocalyptic world but to the world I live in as well.

Station Eleven, along with the concepts of the Traveling Symphony, relate to me greatly in the current stage of my life. I have always had the dilemma of finding my purpose. For instance, I know topics and subjects that I am good at, but I always question whether I could or want to have a career involving them. I am indecisive and thus find it hard to determine what I want to do with my life. The novel has given me a certain perspective of living life with passion (“survival is insufficient”). My goal going into college is to find my passion. Whether it is traveling and performing, accounting, writing, graphic design, etc., I will find that passion in the next four years, and I will capitalize on that passion.

In retrospect, life is about finding your purpose. I will spend the next several years of my life attempting to do this, and I will be using the Traveling Symphony and their motto, “survival is insufficient,” as a guide. It is no coincidence that I had to read this novel (which addresses the biggest problem in my life thus far) and write a paper about it. I am going to take more risks in college and regret none of them. I am going to discover who I am and who I want to be. I am going to find my passion. And I am going to figure out how I can get paid to do it for the rest of my life.



Sarah Lochridge—“When I took this photo, I knew that it illustrated a hunger to learn more about the current world and the past worlds. . . . It replicates [Kirsten’s] hobby of breaking into abandoned schools, stores, homes, and other buildings in hopes of learning more about the world before the influenza outbreak.”

Kristen Almeida

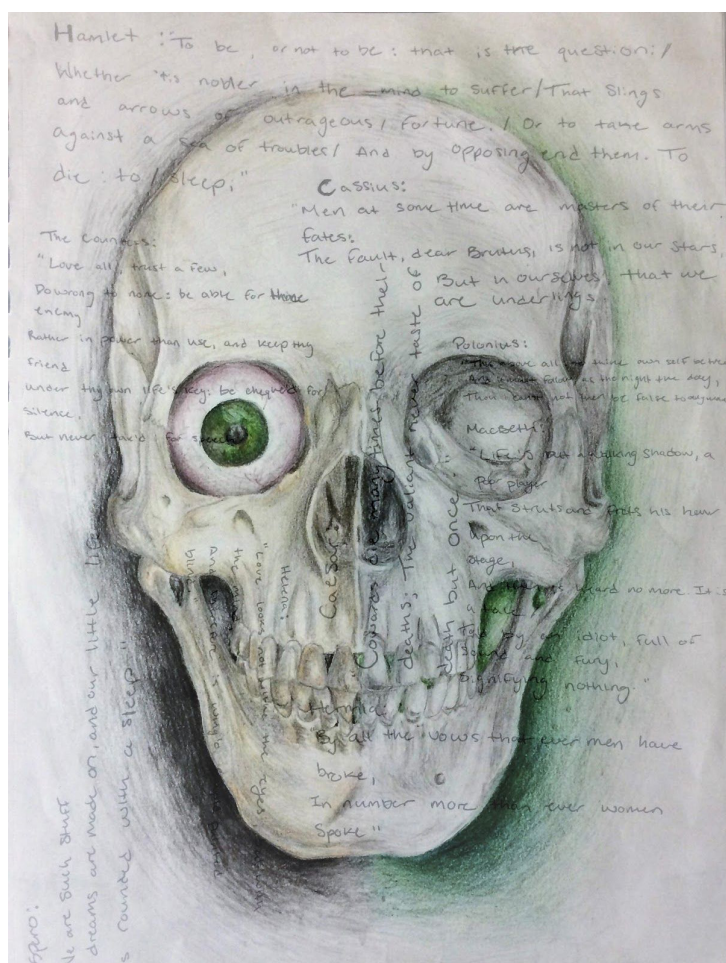
*... a world where the luxuries of today
have become an emblem of the past*

The novel *Station Eleven* takes the reader into a world where the luxuries of today have become an emblem of the past. The novel separates characters' lives into *before* and *after* the pandemic called the Georgia Flu. After the Georgia Flu has passed, leaving an abundant amount of casualties behind, most of those who have survived take to the road. Kirsten Raymonde is a young girl who eventually finds herself among the Traveling Symphony after her brother passes. The Symphony is a group of people of various ages who travel along the road to perform Shakespeare and play concerts for towns. The caravans by which they travel are all labeled with the name "The Traveling Symphony"—the lead caravan marked with an additional line: "because survival is insufficient."

The Symphony, unlike others, continue to travel throughout the towns that remain instead of finding housing to dwell in. Through the performance of plays and concerts, the Symphony displays the last connection to their lives before the Georgia Flu. The saying "survival is insufficient" indicates the aim behind the Traveling Symphony. The quote covertly shows the beliefs of the Symphony, saying that simply surviving is not enough for one to live. To survive, a person must do the minimal things (eat, drink, and sleep), but to live is different. Those around the Symphony simply want to survive, but those who are a part of the Symphony want to live. To live, the Symphony performs not because they have to but because that is what they live for. They live for the art that has survived the peril of the pandemic as they have.

To me, the quote “survival is insufficient” rings true. Jeevan Chaudhary, although his appearance in the novel is not abundant, inspired me to believe how I want to live. The author, Emily St. John Mandel, peered into Jeevan’s inner thoughts and brought out the line, “At moments when other people could only stare, he wanted to be the one to step forward.” Although the objective of life is to survive, I would like to say that I lived. I want, like Jeevan, to be able to step forward and assist. To be able to help others in need when they need it most would be a reward itself in life. Jeevan’s brother, Frank, wrote in his philanthropist’s memoir, “First we only want to be seen, but once we’re seen, that’s not enough anymore. After that, we want to be remembered.” Although Frank was terribly pessimistic, his quote also aligned with life. People want to be noticed, not only so they aren’t lonesome but so they can be remembered. In a world filled with so many people, each one wanting to be remembered, you have to leave a big mark on the world, or at least your world.

Survival being insufficient is not true for all, but in *Station Eleven* those who want a life with purpose have faith in the statement. Each person in the novel has a goal in their life—the man who took the plane to see his family, Elizabeth who wanted so badly to find a purpose behind the disaster, Tyler who believed he had to share his visions with others, the Symphony who continued to play on throughout the peril they faced—they all found purpose to not only survive but to live. To live, even if your body is telling you that the better option is to give up, shows that survival may be insufficient, but choosing to live is not.



Marlo Black—“My creative expression incorporates the gruesome idea of survival and death with an image of a skull; however, the skull is overlapped with famous quotes from Shakespeare’s plays . . . representing the idea that some creative or meaningful expression is directly correlated with the drive for survival.”

Matthew Collins

“Will Never Be Enough”

Verse 1

Scavenging, sheltering, watching, waiting
Each day filled with anticipating.
Hoping to survive the night into day.
Counting the bodies on the ground that lay.
Trying to protect yourself but are too tired to even breathe.
Keeping watch over your “friends” even when you are asleep.

Chorus

Being alive is a gift that you do not waste.
Thousands of people would rather be in that place.
With everyone to fear, and no one to trust.
Survival out here will never be enough.

Verse 2

It’s always a choice to either move or stay put.
With no cars, one plane, movement only on foot.
People disappearing without a trace or sound,
No bodies in the day to be found.
Progress has to be made with people as one,
Only then will people’s deaths result to none.

Chorus

Being alive is a gift that should not be put to shame.
Thousands of people would rather claim your name.
Being with a team that shines through the rust.
Survival out here will never be enough.

Bridge

Holding on only to the things you need,
Trying to live another life after a terrible deed.
Surviving for your life.
Remembering to forget all the things in the past.
Scarred in your mind that will forever last.
Life or death held between two knives.

Chorus

There will always be hope across the land.
Trekking through nights, streets, and sand,
Survival out here will never be enough.
Survival out here will never be enough.

Analysis of “Will Never Be Enough”

Verse one primarily focuses on Kirsten’s point of view when she is travelling with the Symphony. While she and August are travelling with the Symphony, they realize that it would be better to pursue their journey alone. To Kirsten, survival is not enough for her to have a life. She wants something more with her life rather than travelling with people she does not entirely trust. She takes her life day by day in order to reach the airport where Clark is later found.

The Chorus is different each time but always ends with “Survival out here will never be enough.” The first chorus is focused around the many people who die from the Georgia flu. It also reflects on how the people that are either in the airport or travelling cannot be trusted. For example, they banished one man from the airport early in the book because everyone could not trust him. The last line previously mentioned focuses on moving forward with life. Most of the interviewing questions Kirsten had to answer were focused on her moving forward from her past. The many killings, the long journey, and trust for people were overshadowed by Kirsten because she wanted to move on with her life. Survival is never enough in the book because, in order to really feel safe, one has to do more than survive.

The next verse is focused around the many disappearing people who were taken discretely. Kirsten, August, and the Symphony knew they needed to keep moving, even though there was no transportation. The one plane mentioned in the song focuses on the flight out of the airport that a few passengers decided to take. Clark stayed behind, being safe in his own comfort. The last two lines revolve around progress. In order to be truly productive, people must work together in order to survive and thrive. This is shown through Kirsten and August as they travel together until they make it to the airport, their destination.

The bridge is all about the life after the Georgia flu. Clark was a nobody before the mass genocide, and he was even treated poorly by many of his friends, including Arthur. Now that he is one of the few people alive, he is looked up to by many people. He creates his museum with only the possessions he needs or is given. His life may not be like before; however, it has more meaning. The last two lines talk about Kirsten’s life and her interview. The two knives are symbols of her many killings and later the tattoos of the knives are her scars of the killings.



Tram Le—“My piece *Frasier* captures the emotions of a young man through the use of contrast and watercolor. . . . The warmer tones symbolize the portion of our lives that are necessary for survival, while the cooler tones embody the factors of our lives that bring fulfilment. . . . The color scheme of *Frasier* was designed to be vague to encourage those who see it to develop their own meaning of the motto ‘survival is insufficient.’”

Andrew Comegna

Life is not pass or fail.

Shakespeare finds a way. Civilizations can be destroyed, yet Shakespeare finds a way to still be a part of the culture and education of societies. This is the case in Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven*. The Georgia Flu wipes out almost ninety-nine percent of the population, but Shakespeare is still performed by a Traveling Symphony that goes from town to town performing music and Shakespeare's works for willing audiences. The Traveling Symphony travels in three caravans with their motto printed on the first: "survival is insufficient." This statement relates to transcendence. The Traveling Symphony must not only find shows to survive their work and lives but put on a performance that is inspiring and moving. Personally, I must not only attend class yet get involved and try to create a positive change and improvement in my world.

The Traveling Symphony lives out their motto "survival is insufficient" each and every day. They live in a demolished civilization torn apart by disease and destruction. It is a world backward from the world that it was a decade before. There are no governments or organizations. There is no electricity or modern technology. They struggle every day to not only physically survive every day but to keep alive their art and performance. However, booking shows is not enough. They must dazzle their audience. After one of their performances of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an audience member, the Prophet, remarks, "Let us all thank the Traveling Symphony for this beautiful respite from our daily cares" (Mandel 59). The Symphony must transcend booking a show to survive—and perform in such a manner that takes people away from the struggles of their daily lives. In addition, the Symphony must

maintain relationships and remain in good standing with towns so that they can continue to perform. They must make sacrifices in order to continue to transcend booking shows. After one of the performances, the Conductor says to one of the performers, Kirsten, "He suggested that we consider leaving Alexandra, as a guarantee of future good relations between the Symphony and the town" (65). The Symphony must live out their motto and make sacrifices in order to book shows which allow them to transcend common performance and mesmerize audiences. This transcendence is not only applicable to the Traveling Symphony but also to me and my life and college experience.

"Survival is insufficient" means not only going to class and taking care of myself in order to check off all of the requirements of school and life but to get involved and make a positive difference in the lives of others. It means to dream up the kind of world I want to live in and to dream out loud at high volume. It means to excel beyond a passing grade. It means to try new things. It means stepping out of my comfort zone. It means reaching out to someone in need or someone that is different than me. If someone was to live a life in which they did everything "at the margin," then it would be an unfulfilling life. One could never transcend and reach a level that they never thought attainable. Life is not pass or fail. Life is about how well you loved and how you impacted another person that you are in community with.

Shakespeare lived a life in which "survival is insufficient." He was the first child in his family to survive infancy, and he changed the world forever. He transcended surviving and created a lasting power that even a plagued, destroyed world could experience. The Traveling Symphony transcended booking a normal show to taking people out of their struggled life, and I can involve myself in the lives of others and create a lasting, positive influence.



Erin Remijan—"I chose to paint this specific scene of Kirsten wearing the blue dress she scavenged from the abandoned house. . . . She's not just surviving anymore, therefore she was motivated to gather something she thought was beautiful."

Nolan Condle

*She taught me that sometimes the plan
does not go as expected.*

The Traveling Symphony certainly went through a lot. They had to overcome some pretty tough challenges and losses. What I took from the quote “survival is insufficient” was that just living and not accomplishing anything does not make a life worth living. You must go out and explore the world, and the people that are around you should try to make you better as you should try to make them better.

I thought long and hard about that quote before I read the book and again when I was reading the book. I believe it is all about making a life worth living and everything that comes with it. It made me think of my sisters and my parents who make my life worth living and made me think of the many sacrifices they have made for me. It made me realize I am the person I am because of them.

My mom taught me how to work hard and to set goals and accomplish them. She taught me some days you are going to have to put in a little more effort and struggle a little to get to where you want to be. My mom raised three kids on her own while working two jobs to support her family. She made sure she always took care of us before she took care of herself. She would feed us before she fed herself. She would make sure all the kids were buckled before she buckled herself in the car. She would get the kids groceries and everything we wanted before she got what she wanted.

My oldest sister had my beautiful niece when she was just eighteen years old and still in high school. My sister graduated high school and went on to get her real estate license to support her child that she was going to raise by herself. She taught me that sometimes the plan does not go as expected and you have to adjust to the current

situation. She taught me strength and that I must hold my ground while also being independent and responsible. My younger sister battled with a learning disability and worked hard in school to graduate high school. She also worked two jobs to pay for her college. My grandma taught me how you always have to be there for people, especially family. She let my two sisters, my mom, my niece, and I live with her while my grandfather was in a battle with cancer in her three-bedroom house.

I believe the Traveling Symphony, as they traveled through the Great Lake region looking for food, water, and shelter, had to overcome hard obstacles while looking out for one another and fighting for one another.

The quote also relates to college. If you just show up to class and not engage or pay attention, there is really no point. College is about meeting new people, networking yourself, getting prepared for the future, going to school plays, attending football games on Saturdays, staying up late studying for exams, and so much more.

I believe the quote “survival is insufficient” truly means if you are going to do something, do it to the fullest extent and never look back. There are going to be struggles and barriers in your way, but you must learn to go through them. The Traveling Symphony was not just going to give up and let each other suffer. They were going to give it their all and not let their current situation get the best of them.

Challenges and people who want you to fail will always be there, but one must overcome adversity to find out who they really are. Everyone fails one time or another, and things do not always go according to plan. But that is what makes life worth living. I believe that is Mandel’s overall message in the book and the quote.

Life is what you make it, so get up and do something and accomplish something.



Jonathan Overholt— “I think what it means is that just living to survive and make do with life is entirely insufficient and empty, whereas finding purpose in life and finding certain passions and values to live for makes life entirely sufficient. . . . I photographed one of my favorite places on earth and tried my best to capture what God uses to remind me that life is sufficient. . . . And that is the beauty of nature that God has given us.”

Ella Condra

*Oftentimes I wished away the days . . . and I look back now
and wonder where that precious time went.*

Throughout the book *Station Eleven*, the reader sees multiple views and perspectives of certain characters on how to survive in a world that is falling apart as they know it. What started out to be a normal day in the lives of many actors turned into the start of the fall of humankind as they watched Arthur, the man playing King Lear in the Shakespeare play, fall to his death on stage by a fast-spreading disease.

This disease, called the “Georgia Flu,” came by a group of people boarding off a plane from Moscow and began wiping out the human race immediately. Years and millions of deaths later, a group formed called the “Traveling Symphony” who travel around to the few formed communities left in the world and perform Shakespeare to those communities to bring some life back into the world. The Traveling Symphony goes by a motto “Survival is Insufficient.” And as the reader goes deeper into the book, he/she will find out the reasons why that motto was so important to them and how it saved them in the corrupt world.

After reading this book, I believe that the Traveling Symphony believed this motto and was worth it to them because of the true relationships and community they had with one another. The human race was ending around them, and they could have given up with the rest of the survivors, but instead they chose to live out their last days being surrounded by community and bringing happiness to others. That doesn’t mean it was a constant joyride for them. It was known that there were mental issues, jealousy, and resentments towards others in this group that traveled together 365 days a year, but what made it “bearable” to them were the friendships, music, and Shakespeare.

With that being said, the motto “Survival is Insufficient” means everything to the Traveling Symphony because it shows who they are and why they have chosen to live out their lives not just surviving but living with a passion while sharing that passion with others.

In other instances, the motto “Survival is Insufficient” is something that I would like to align with my life going into the next four years of college. I agree with the Traveling Symphony; I want my life to have a purpose and to not blend in with the rest of the crowd. I do not want these next four years to blink before my eyes and for me to look back and not be proud of what I accomplished. Oftentimes a college student revolves his/her life around eating, sleeping, studying, and socializing—which are all good things—but I want to make a difference and not be in survival mode at all times. I want these next four years to make me reach out of my comfort zone and make connections with people—like the Traveling Symphony—that I may not have connected with if I did not reach out to them. I want to live in a way where the world could end tomorrow, and living each day extraordinary.

This quote aligns with my life purely by me wanting it to, because I do not think I lived by this motto in high school. Oftentimes I wished away the days, wanting to be in the next stage of my life, and I look back now and wonder where that precious time went. I wanted to get onto bigger and better things, but that could easily turn into a non-cycle of wanting something better and not truly living out my life the right way. That is why I truly want to live by this motto in college, because I regret the way I thought and lived in high school. I want to bring this different mindset with me into college and make it worth it by reaching out to other people and making connections with them, because that is what makes life worth it: human connections. To conclude, this book taught me a lot of life lessons, and the biggest lesson I learned is to live each day with a purpose because survival is truly insufficient.

Caleb Corley

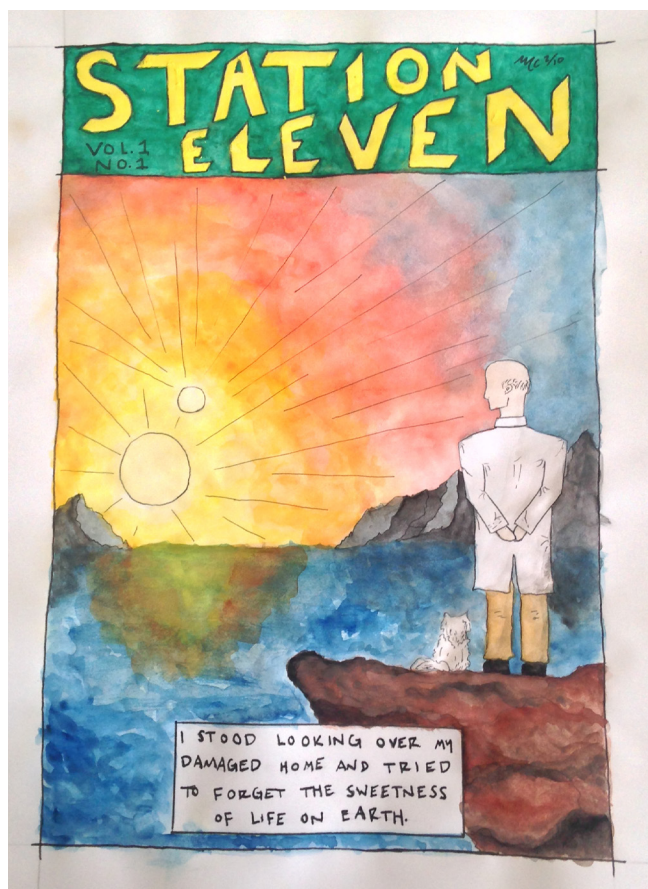
I want to be able to take more than just a diploma with me.

Could anyone truly imagine life in an apocalyptic world? In *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel a simple case of a very contagious flu phases civilization into an apocalypse. During most fictional apocalyptic novels and movies, characters are merely just trying to survive, but in *Station Eleven* a group of survivors are doing more than just getting by. This group calls itself the “Traveling Symphony” and consists of actors and musicians who attempt to keep culture alive.

The Traveling Symphony lives by the motto “Survival is insufficient.” The motto simply means that surviving is not enough. Survival, to them, is not living. The Traveling Symphony wants to do more than just get by in the apocalyptic world; they want to make a life out of the tragedy. I want to approach college very similarly to how the Traveling Symphony approaches the apocalypse.

College is said to be the best and the worst four years of an individual’s life. After I finish my four years at the University of Tennessee, I want to be able to take more than just a diploma with me. If I am just getting by, I will only accomplish an education. Moving through college with minimal involvement is not living. As a Volunteer, I want to be involved in the Vol community. I must make a name for myself just as the Traveling Symphony made a mark in the dying community of *Station Eleven*.

The majority of individuals who attend a college or university gather memories and experiences that will last a lifetime. I am craving to witness the memories and experiences that my predecessors have lived through. At first college seemed very frightening and dangerous; likewise, the Traveling Symphony experienced similar emotions at the beginning of the apocalypse. After finding a purpose in either college or the novel’s apocalypse, the Traveling Symphony and I found ways to live and flourish in the communities around us.



Katherine McKay—“I fell asleep in class. I kept my 4.0. I dealt with overwhelming anxiety. I graduated valedictorian of my class. I cried a lot. . . . And I still ‘made it.’ . . . I don’t agree that ‘survival is insufficient,’ because sometimes surviving is all you can do. . . . I created a cover for the first edition of Miranda’s *Station Eleven* comics because her body of work was almost entirely inconsequential to the world before the collapse but was revered and worshipped in the world after.”

Ben Coughenour

*... to strive to do what you love
and to live for that thing that you love.*

In Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, there are a number of themes that she expresses throughout the story, like survival, death, faith, civilization, and art (Ginsberg). Two themes that I believe are most important are civilization and survival. These themes in the story properly relate to the Symphony's motto of "survival is insufficient." This motto that encapsulates the entire book can be interpreted in many ways, but I will discuss how I believe it is perceived by the Symphony and by myself in my everyday life.

The theme of civilization relates to the Symphony's motto, because this story takes place in a time in the future where civilization has flirted with extinction. The Traveling Symphony was grown from the largest mass disaster to date in human history, the Georgia Flu. The Symphony's members either faintly remember the past civilization that we know today or only dream about what it was like from what they hear from the older members of the group who witnessed it. There are specific symbols throughout the story that all identify with the theme of civilization, like the airplane (Ginsberg). Throughout the story, the characters are fascinated with the theory of airplanes, because they remind them of civilization and human connection. The theme of survival also relates to the motto, because in the end they are trying to survive. Not only are they trying to survive but they are trying to revive this sense of civilization and human connection. Together, survival and civilization tie knots to form their motto "survival is insufficient"—because they believe that surviving is not enough. They must create a life that is what many have forgotten and has been extinct, and that is human connection and mass civilization. That is why they created the Traveling Symphony.

In my own life, I can strongly relate to the Symphony's motto. I believe that the motto "survival is insufficient" means one simple thing: to strive to do what you love and to live for that thing that you love. Throughout my entire life, I have been clueless as to what or who I wanted to strive to become when I step into the workforce. "Survival is insufficient" reminds me that whatever I decide to do for the rest of my life, it needs to be something that I love to do every single day. Like the Traveling Symphony, I want to do what makes me happy—and hope to make a difference in the world. Like Arthur, if it kills me, I would be at peace with that outcome, because I would have died doing what I love. If a person can live their life with that mindset, then they will have a great, meaningful life.

Whether it be traveling around a new world spreading art and human connection to restore civilization or striving to become an engineer like myself, this motto can be interpreted in many ways. I think, though, everyone can agree on the most important part: do what you love to do, not what you have to do, even if it kills you.

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Kellie Seagraves—“Emily St. John Mandel creates a deep dark world in her novel *Station Eleven* and fills it with small lights in the form of a ragtag group of characters that make up the Traveling Symphony. My painting attempts to capture the overall feel of the novel by placing a light bulb as the focal point to create a contrast in the surrounding world or desolate background. The thick strokes of white leading outward represent those around you that you can shed light on.”

Jessica Crawford

*I want to build lifelong relationships, become an amazing
future educator, and be somebody's new best friend.*

When you typically think of human survival you typically begin to think of the necessities: food, water, air, sleep. But, do you think of the others such as emotion, routine, and balance? In agreement with today's society, the members of the Traveling Symphony in Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* show their need for more things than just surviving.

For instance, love. Every living thing has the natural desire to be loved. Constantly in the novel after the collapse people are worried and eager to find out where and what has happened to their significant others. They question their position, their status, and then live in a constant state of wonder and questioning after they realize that there is no real way to communicate or figure any other information out. The lingering motto of "survival is insufficient" is evident within this argument. The members of the Symphony are also in wonder of when they will be reunited with their lost friends and lost family members. The insufficiency of survival is shown here because all of the members are alive, breathing air, intaking food and water, surviving—but are they unsatisfied? They need love: they need their families, their friends, and all the other things within the world that give them a sense of importance and commitment.

We, as humans, tend to follow whatever leads us to contentment. Although the members are happy participating in plays, traveling around, searching and exploring, the happiness eventually wears off. They become aware of their surroundings and aware that they are hopelessly traveling around in a world that they are unsure of who or what even occupies it. This relates to my life and my college

experience because it is easy to be distracted and caught up within school work or a job that you forget how much you need—everyone needs as a human—other human interaction. Nobody wants to be by themselves all the time. We are programmed to have emotion and care about others around us and desire to be with them.

In this novel there was a lot of love before the collapse, but afterwards their view on love was almost demented. The idea of love was twisted; they were confused, scared, and on edge because they were uncertain of what was to come. I believe that the characters still were aware of what love was, but they failed to truly express it to those around them. Showing and feeling love after the collapse was as rare as rain coming in a drought.

Balance adds to the tier by showing the importance of stability within jobs, family, friends, and everything else in between. The members of the Symphony were happy doing what they loved—but like it says above, unsatisfied. The idea of just simply being alive was slowly wearing off and not being enough for them. In our lives today, we struggle with balancing. Balancing necessities, seeing our family members, spending time with our friends, having a “social life,” maintaining grades and jobs.

A lot of pressure is put on teens and, really, people everywhere in our society. This overarching statement relates to my life today more than it ever has. Being an incoming college freshmen, I have been given more responsibility this week than I have in the past seventeen years. I need to study, probably get a job, make new friends, and maintain all of this while being able to visit my family, do other extracurriculars, and all the other things that come along with college. Sure, I can survive here on campus and strive to be successful, but just being here is not enough. In order to get the full college experience, the full life experience, we must put ourselves out there and do more than just surviving. Unlike in *Station Eleven*,

there are many things to do and many people to see here. After the collapse, the only real interactions these people had were with the people they were already with. No real new relationships were formed, nobody went out of their comfort zone and was successful, everyone just remained content with their loneliness—aligning with my college perspective because I want to be successful here and not just be here. I want to build lifelong relationships, become an amazing future educator, and be somebody's new best friend. Just living on campus, going to class, and graduating is not enough for me. In order to become successful in college and within life itself, we must have a balance. The characters in this novel struggled with balance because they were left with the familiarity of everything before the collapse. Nothing new, nothing fresh.

In the novel *Station Eleven*, the members of the Traveling Symphony were simply alive. Striving for success but falling short every time took a toll on these characters and made it obvious how necessary it is for humans to be more than just breathing. We need love and balance within our lives to truly make us alive. Instead of just intaking oxygen, we need to feel wanted and needed and cared for by other humans. This relates to my college experience by showing me that just being a student who attends classes and studies is not enough. In order to be successful, we need to be interacting and meeting new colleagues and friends and becoming active in clubs, extracurriculars, sports—whatever makes your heart happy—in order to reach balance and sufficiency within our lives.



Sophia Spock—“It was this transformation from survival to enrichment that I aimed to capture in my own art piece. For example, the strings on the cello I drew are meant to represent a music staff. Before the cello is played the notes on the staff are static—and are thus just existing. This is meant to represent mundane survival because, initially, nothing is being *made* from the notes. However, when the notes are played, they float off of the staff and show the music that has been created. In this case, I intended to convey the sheet music as a metaphor for life, as it stagnantly survives until a musician uses it to make music and thus creates something worthwhile out of its metaphorical ‘life.’”

Sydni Crowe

I am ready for that challenge and privilege.

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Station Eleven* brought to life by the inspiring Emily St. John Mandel, the Traveling Symphony's characters endure their imaginative world living by a few short words that surprisingly can be applied to the earth of today: "survival is insufficient." Amidst their heartbreaking pasts and partly because of them, the Symphony members cling to this understanding that there is a meaning behind their harsh lives worth more than only following the motions of survival. Knowing that the comradery in acting brings that cheerful knowledge to their audiences, they are able to grow close despite their differences. Their proverb of survival applies to each individual persona in the story as well, seen especially through the thoughts and actions of Kirsten Raymonde, Jeevan Chaudhary, and the infamous Prophet.

As a reader and soon-to-be college attendee, it is easy to apply the phrase to the realization of the insufficiency of only surviving through school. I realize that there is a meaning behind the next four years of my life, and I look forward to going a step further than "surviving" by finding my mismatched group of people who I can walk the path with along the way.

To each one of the *Station Eleven* leading characters, the term "survival is insufficient" proves that they must go further than only surviving life; instead, they must learn to read and understand their roles in the play of life, not just in Shakespeare. For Kirsten Raymonde, the meaning she found for her life was that it can only be fulfilled by doing something she loved. Ever since she was told by Jeevan Chaudhary that Arthur Leander died "doing the thing he loved best in the world," she dedicated her life to doing the same

(Mandel, 8). Acting was something she was able to hold on to, despite the difficult circumstances the plague brought. Jeevan, on the other hand, learned that he was meant to be a paramedic. After witnessing the scenario of Leander's death and Jeevan's own brave attempt to save him, Jeevan instantly knew he was meant for something not everyone is capable of (Mandel, 4). He later turned into a doctor for his post-apocalyptic settlement, McKinley (Mandel, 271). Lastly, the Prophet perceived himself as the light in a world surrounded by "an ocean of darkness" (Mandel, 302). He thought he was sent to revive the world and therefore dedicated his existence to saving it.

While I wouldn't quite associate myself with the Prophet exactly, I can relate to his goals along with Kirsten's and Jeevan's. Similarly to the Prophet, I know I am meant to be a light at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I know I am meant to study accounting in the Haslam College of Business under the Chancellor's Honors Program. I want to be a great addition to the school I've loved and thought about my whole life.

Like Jeevan, I've learned my niche in life: accounting. I look forward to refining my skills and abilities towards achieving a career in the field. I plan to grow and excel into an incredible business woman, capable of making my college proud. Like Kirsten, I want to love my time in school, the people I choose to spend it with, and what I have chosen to study. I know I am meant to make memories I will never forget. I can't wait to walk the road and learn what my collegiate experience has in store for me. I understand that hard work and dedication will be required to finish the path, and I am ready for that challenge and privilege. I look forward to discovering what greatness I am meant for at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, because, for me, surviving through school is insufficient.



Libby Anderson—"In this piece I did of my friend David's hands, I wanted to show how the art he does translates into his hands. A lot of the work David does requires sharp tools or charcoal that stains or manipulates his hands. . . . For David, living life to the fullest means creating art no matter how dirty his hands may look."

Jamie Dallas

*The mistakes, the failed relationships, the
missed opportunities—they all teach valuable lessons.*

Merriam-Webster defines survival as “the continuation of life or existence,” insinuating that survival requires nothing more than avoiding death. Throughout Emily St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven*, the Traveling Symphony repeats the mantra “survival is insufficient” as a means of motivation through the trying circumstances they endure. The group’s attempts to further define survival are reflected by their actions and values. While their circumstances warrant a stale life of mere existence, they yearn for more. The group relies on cultural enrichment, interpersonal relationships, meaningful work, and lessons gleaned through hardship to distinguish living from surviving. In all, the fruits of experience allow for self-fulfillment beyond the primal instinct to survive in order to make living meaningful and worthwhile.

Beyond the novel, experience yields plentiful profit of personal growth, one catalyst being travel. For one, traveling allows for unique opportunities to learn through first-hand experience and observation. Through travel, one grows by indulging in worldly cultures, acquiring a broader worldview as a result of increased cultural awareness. Exploration allows for unique challenges that invite travelers to push personal boundaries in their efforts to become more open to understanding the various similarities and differences among people around the world. In encountering foreign literature, music, art, and other cultural humanities, one feeds a growing intellectual appetite as he or she gains knowledge of life across the globe. Therefore, travel provides an outlet for total immersion in diverse ways of life that culminates in individual growth through cultural enrichment.

While world travel necessitates engaging in foreign cultures, it is possible to gain a fresh perspective sans crossing borders by interacting with people in one's community. Human interaction and relationships are a fundamental aspect of daily life that allow for the fulfillment of many personal needs. For one, it is mutually beneficial when individuals are truly present and attentive in conversation, aiming to understand one another rather than volleying apathetic responses. In this way, it is possible to explore different values and beliefs through sincere communication, as each person is able to give what they have to offer and receive what others may provide in return. Furthermore, human interaction allows for the expression of love in all forms, whether through familial, platonic, or amorous relationships. Thus, strong relationships are necessary to satiate the basic human needs of feeling understood, loved, and worthy.

Intellectual stimulation and placated emotional needs are key factors to achieving satisfaction with life; however, perhaps the most critical human need is a sense of purpose. To achieve a sense of purpose, one begins by accumulating the unique skills he or she possesses. Next, it is necessary to identify the passion one intends to follow in order to give direction to his or her work. Finally, each individual's skills may be used in pursuit of his or her passion as they seek to give back to the people, community, and world that fostered their growth. Moreover, meaningful work results in growth of the individual and the community, provides an outlet for dispersing skills accumulated over a lifetime, and nurtures self-actualization.

Nonetheless, regardless of every valiant effort towards achieving self-fulfillment, the journey would be nothing without struggle. The mistakes, the failed relationships, the missed opportunities—they all teach valuable lessons of perseverance and determination that are vital

to future success, for it is only after failure that one can truly value success. Previous failures allow for a deeper appreciation of sacrifices made to achieve goals.

Overall, the fundamental elements of a fulfilled life align with my prospective collegiate goals and priorities. I aim to travel, enrich my knowledge, nourish new relationships, and seek my purpose despite the troubles I am bound to face. As a whole, I intend to grow as a person, because, ultimately, the sufficiency of survival is defined by the fulfillment of its purpose.

Katelyn Dalton

*I used to see school as just a place where you got the grades
you needed to get the job you've always wanted.*

Dear Kirsten,

It is clear to anyone that having “survival is insufficient” branded on the front caravan leading the Traveling Symphony displays how much that quote guides your lives. After reading about how much you all have been through, it is mesmerizing to me that you all have found these three simple words to motivate you throughout your journey. For those members of your team that remember what the old world was like before the Georgia Flu, I am sure it is much harder to live by this, not knowing if things will ever be the same. However, I admire your perseverance to always make sure you are not only living but making the most out of each and every day. You were a vital role model to every civilian that crossed paths with you; they learned that there can be more to life than just breathing. I owe you much gratitude for giving me a new outlook on life, which is exactly why I’m writing to you.

Even though you all joined this select group at different times, you all live by the same words and joined for the same reason. For example, you are someone who remembers very little from the old world, although you do remember the family that was taken from you. Joining the Traveling Symphony gave you a new family and people that contributed to making your life full again. Simply being alone while eating, drinking, and sleeping every day was not enough for you unless you had people to share that with. Even when things get tough and half of you go missing, your journeys do not stop until everyone is accounted for. Getting involved with a group who shared

the same goal in life, which was to do much more than just live, allowed you guys to create a family that you may not have found. The fact that these assembled letters mean much more to you than just words has inspired me to branch out.

Your association and their motto has molded my lookout on the whole college experience. I used to see school as just a place where you got the grades you needed to get the job you've always wanted. I am now determined to get involved, find a group of people that will help me to discover something more from the day than just going to class. Making Rocky Top not only my school but also my home and family will help me to get the most out of these next four years. Kirsten, one of my biggest goals is to grow more as a person and get out of the habit of wishing the days away. You've shown that even when there is nothing, anyone can always make something happen if you are determined to put the work in. Of course, I won't forget along the way that the end game here is to get that degree that I can be proud of. Thank you for allowing me to look at your story from start to finish and sharing something that means so much to you.

From,
An Appreciative Vol
(Katelyn Dalton)



Ayanna Humphrey—“For my painting, I decided to focus mainly on Kirsten’s favorite form of entertainment: the comic book *Station Eleven*. . . . I oil-painted my own depiction of the small space station-planet, based on the book’s vivid description. I have included a large seahorse from the dangerous Undersea. The planet has a water system problem and is now composed of mostly islands with bridges connecting them, which I have included in my piece. If you look closely on the left side of the painting, I have included Dr. Eleven and his small dog, Luli, walking on the beach under the twilight sky.”

Annika Fischer

I am about to go to a new place, with completely new people, and without any comforts from the life I've known for eighteen years.

“All I’m saying,’ Dieter said, twelve hours out of St. Deborah by the Water, ‘is that quote on the lead caravan would be way more profound if we hadn’t lifted it from *Star Trek*’” (p. 119). This line from Emily St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven* is one of the few comments made regarding the Traveling Symphony’s motto, “Because survival is insufficient,” despite the fact that this is arguably one of the most integral parts of the piece.

In this post-epidemic civilization, almost every area of life seems to have taken many steps backwards as a result of the flu virus that gutted the population. The only thing, however—Mandel argues—that has remained intact is art. The term art is represented specifically by musical instruments and Shakespearean plays in *Station Eleven* but is inclusive of all forms of art. This seems to be a focal point of the novel: the purpose of the Traveling Symphony to remind people that survival is not the only thing to live for, and, if it were, then it is not worth living at all.

During all 333 pages of Mandel’s piece, there is only one scene where the Traveling Symphony actually performs, and this is at the end of chapter eleven. The reason for its importance is not because of the play itself but because of the reactions of both Kirsten and the audience, as described in the first paragraph of chapter twelve: “The audience rose for a standing ovation. Kirsten stood in the state of suspension that always came over her at the end of performances, a sense of having flown very high and landed incompletely, her soul pulling upward out of her chest. A man in the front row had tears in his eyes” (p. 59). The responses of these people, who have known nothing but loss and suffering for twenty years, is proof alone of the great importance art has in life. Every form of art is a way for

individuals to express themselves. But, when survival is constantly at the forefront of one's mind, it replaces everything else. The Traveling Symphony is a light in this dark way of living; they remind people that while art may not be important for literal and physical survival, it is a necessity to emotional and spiritual well-being. To simply survive is not enough.

On a much different note, this motto, "Because survival is insufficient," can be applied to my life as I begin my freshman year of college. I am about to go to a new place, with completely new people, and without any comforts from the life I've known for eighteen years. I know that I can feed myself, get dressed in the morning, and provide for my basic needs. I also know that I can show up to class, study diligently, and get good grades. I can survive college. But what about putting myself out there, getting involved in clubs and organizations, making new friends, and forming relationships with the people around me? None of these are necessary to my survival, but if I don't do them I know I won't be happy. In order to make the most of my college experience and really love my time at UT, I have to dive into these things. I have to find a support system for myself and make time for fun. Surviving isn't necessarily the same thing as living, and I want to live.

Once I started reading *Station Eleven*, I finished the entire novel in a matter of days, because it was just too good to put down. In the moment, I just kept reading; but, when I was finished, I began to think about why it captivated me, and I believe the reason is "because survival is insufficient." The concept was fairly basic to me; it wasn't a new ideal or a particularly hard one to grasp. However, given my current situation, I felt that it had gained a substantial amount of meaning since the last time I had pondered it. The motto means the same to me as it does to Kirsten and the rest of the Traveling Symphony: "First we only want to be seen"—or in this case survive—"but once we're seen, that's not enough anymore. After that we want to be remembered" (p. 187).



Taylor Bogle—“I created my piece *Mirrored* . . . in which I have paired human aspects with that of a falcon. . . . To me, animals and humans are on the same level. If society collapses, we boil down to our core survival instincts—something animals live by daily.”

Camryn Ford

*Do not be the person who only has time for homework.
Be the person screaming in Neyland Stadium
or the person creating art on the Rock.*

Would you rather survive or thrive in the world? According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word survive means “continuing to live or exist,” and the word thrive means “to grow, develop, or be successful.” Thriving sounds much more appealing, but many people in the world struggle with its concept. In *Station Eleven*, the Traveling Symphony set themselves apart by devoting their focus on a passion rather than survival. In order to thrive in life, you need to follow after the Traveling Symphony and put your focus on activities that bring you joy.

In the dangerous, deadened world left behind from the Georgia Flu, merely existing is not sustainable. The new realm has caused humans to walk around with knives that are easy to reach and eyes always looking for threats. The majority of the people remaining in the unfamiliar, new world are just trying to get through each day. The Traveling Symphony, however, is different. They are not just trying to exist in the foreign, eerie world; they have made it their mission to make sure that theatre and music is not another forgotten pastime. Although the members of the symphony still are not immune to the dangers the world possesses, they have banded together and devoted their existence to something other than just survival. They have retained a passion for performing that allows them to bring joy into their lives and the lives of others. Their performances allow their audiences to see that survival is not the only thing important in life.

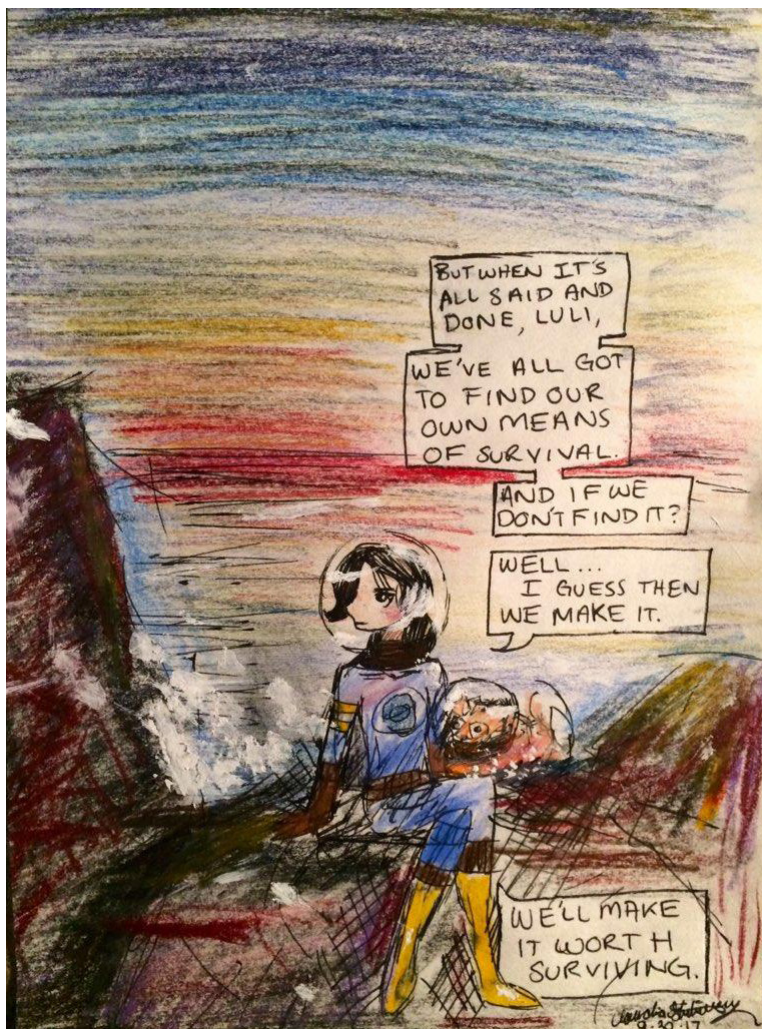
Each of the Traveling Symphony’s caravans is labeled as such, but the first caravan has something additional on it. The phrase “because

survival is insufficient” (Mandel 58) is also written. That additional line shows why the symphony banded together. It allows the foreign towns they visit to see and know what drives them to put on the productions they do. It shows that, although survival is important, it is not what you should base your life around. Instead of worrying about how they will get through each day, the symphony concentrate on what play they should perform. The Traveling Symphony’s motto reminds them that without a purpose to work towards, life is meaningless. The world they are living in may be dull, but they have found a way to make it a bit brighter.

Even in the modern realm we live in, some people still only survive. It is easy to sit back and watch time pass by, but that approach to life causes you to miss out on endless opportunities. Throughout my sophomore year of high school, anxiety consumed me. Each day, I just tried to make it to the next day. I did not attend any football games, pep rallies, or even hang out with friends. I was surviving, but I was not living. Due to a strong determination and help from doctors and therapists, however, I was able to break through the walls of anxiety that were confining me and seek out a purpose in life again. Not only was I able to get involved in the old activities I loved but I was able to dive into new ones I had not yet tried and discover new interests. I learned how important it was to find something, no matter how small, that helped make your life on earth worth living. We are not supposed to watch time pass by but make the most of the time we do have.

Merely existing is not sustainable in college either. It can be easy to get overwhelmed with the extra amount of studying in college; however, it is important not to let that consume you. College is a time where you are not only meant to prepare for the real world but also to have fun and find your true self. It is crucial to find a club, an organization, or a hobby that you enjoy to give yourself a chance

to experience the pleasurable aspect of college life. No matter how much time you devote to studying, you will not be immune to the stress and hardship. Throughout your time in college, do not be the person who only has time for homework. Be the person screaming in Neyland Stadium or the person creating art on the Rock. Life is short and the future is unexpected. So, be like the Traveling Symphony and find something to strive for.



Claudia Gutierrez—"The arts have always been a passion of mine because of their power to transcend the daily surface of society."

Anna Franklin

*For them, every sunrise brings the same,
delightful reality . . . Thrive today.*

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Station Eleven*, survival is still the status quo, even twenty years after the Georgia Flu. Most individuals scraped by with only one focus in mind—make it through the day. Those with any remaining hope only dreamed about the world as it used to be, but their blissful talk was just shallow hope, for the old world was long gone. Every sunrise brought the same, dreadful reality . . . *Survive today.*

However, a few individuals had the audacity to cling to that shallow hope. Eventually their paths crossed, and the Traveling Symphony was born. During civilization's collapse, these mavericks dared to consider survival insufficient. They dared to traverse the perilous miles just to share their Shakespeare and symphony. They dared to hinge their lives on the hope of restoring a fraction of the former life for so many despondent souls. At the base of it all, their core motivation, undergirding all their actions, was their succinct mantra that "survival is insufficient."

Yet I must pose the question—if survival is insufficient, why was the Traveling Symphony content to survive? Indeed, they were thriving in the fine arts. But is success in one area considered thriving as a whole? Or, had these post-apocalyptic mavericks accepted survival without realizing? For example, Kirsten was obsessed with electric lights, but not once did she stop at a library to learn how to wire a light from scavenged solar panels herself. Or, despite their audacious talk, did Kirsten and August ever browse a library to satiate their curiosity about parallel universes? Did anyone of the Symphony ever learn anything about science? No, because

these things were no longer relevant post-apocalypse—survival took top priority.

Yet, the Symphony was not alone. The survival mindset was mutual across all remaining humanity. Not once did these individuals think about pioneering a new society after the end of the world, because they were content that they had survived the apocalypse. Yet I long to step into Mandel's novel and ask the remaining souls, why not use timber to build houses instead of living in old buildings? Why not gather seeds from grocery stores to plant farms instead of scavenging? Why not use natural ingredients to create soap? Why not weave fabric? While we're at it—why not engineer a new fuel to power cars? Why not invent an entirely new mode of transportation altogether? Even without all the grandeurs of the old world, a primitive civilization could easily have been developed in eighteen or nineteen years, except that all the survivors remained trapped in the survival mindset.

When I look across my college campus, I see the same mindset that was present in *Station Eleven*. In fact, I believe it grips countless students on college campuses across the nation today. They have been dropped into an entirely new world, never to return to the old world of high school. They long for the old comforts but focus on surviving. To these students, college is only about making the grade. Their mantra is *Survive today*.

There are other students who believe they are thriving, analogous to the fictional Traveling Symphony. But are they truly? Are they simply trying to preserve high school ways of life or are they creating something new? Are they meeting requirements or exceeding expectations? Are they creating their future . . . or are they preserving their past?

Even three years after setting foot on campus, survival is still the status quo. Most souls scrape by with one focus in mind—make

it through the day. Those with any remaining hope only yearn for the world as it used to be. However, it is a shallow hope, for the old world is long gone. Every sunrise brings the same, dreadful reality . . . *Survive today.*

But there are a select few who have no parallel in the story of *Station Eleven*. Scattered across the world are a few daring mavericks who are not content with simple survival or thriving in just one area. Instead, they are pioneering the future. These are the leaders of tomorrow. But in the same breath, they are the leaders of today. While they remember their past world, they are not defined by it because they are busy creating a new one. For them, every sunrise brings the same, delightful reality . . . *Thrive today.*

After reading *Station Eleven*, a question burns in my heart. Because I cannot ask the fictional Traveling Symphony this question, I pose it to you, my reader. *Are you truly thriving?*

Whether you have survived the apocalypse or finals week, take this question into careful consideration. Be careful when you think you are thriving, because you just might be surviving . . . and survival is insufficient.



Rachel Henry—“In the painting, the figure is holding an open book while reaching up towards a tiny bee in front of rolling clouds in an almost-twilight sky. . . . My version of living means delving into the creative side of the world and being submerged in the immensely beautiful nature that we have access to. If I were to describe a calm, perfect day, it would be to find a quiet place to read a book outside, and maybe just sit and think while watching the world move around me.”

Alex Gardner

*Every single day of my life I will be faced with opportunities
to become a better version of myself.*

“Survival is insufficient” is the motto and mantra that drives the Traveling Symphony, a group of men and women in a post-apocalyptic world, to go out of their way to spread the beauty and wonders of theatre and music to townships and survivors throughout the Great Lakes region of North America. These individuals realize that, to virtually every other human being on this planet, things like art, music, and plays are nothing more than trifles and luxuries of a forgotten time, one before an epidemic wiped out nearly everyone on Earth.

That being said, the Traveling Symphony recognizes that they have the power to insert something positive into the lives of those they encounter, something that they can enjoy for a change and indulge in. They know that, although what they have to offer may not guarantee another day on Earth, it does grant a higher quality of life to their fellow men and women for as long as they’re still breathing. This attitude of going above and beyond, living life to the fullest, and always striving for an opportunity to enrich themselves and their peers is something to be admired, appreciated, and reproduced in our lives. As an individual preparing to start my college career in almost a month’s time, this motto has already been present in my life at times, including simply making the decision to attend college. But is even more important in the sense that I can choose to let this motto help me and guide me in my future decisions, pointing me towards a happier and more productive life.

As far as what’s relevant to the Traveling Symphony, these are all individuals who survived the “Georgia Flu,” an exceptionally fast

and transmittable strain of disease which wiped out 99 percent of the human population on Earth. For roughly twenty years (the Symphony took several post-flu years to be built up, as it is described in the book), the Symphony made it a mission of theirs to not only do what was necessary to survive in their hollowed-out world but to thrive in it by offering whatever beauty and happiness they could to the world's last human inhabitants.

Some individuals like Kirsten already had a background in things that the Symphony does, but others may have known little to nothing about the very thing they now provide in the post-flu world. The motto may be more obvious and tied to those of the Symphony, but the attitude of doing more than simply subsisting in this ravaged world is demonstrated by the actions and thoughts of many other characters we follow throughout this book. Jeevan Chaudhary, who survived on his own after the death of his brother, managed to not only make it out of Toronto and keep breathing for twenty-plus years but instead found a way to forge his own path in the world, fulfilling his dream of serving others as a health professional. He gets married, has a kid, and comes to love his job, all things that he failed to do in his past life.

Thankfully, the things that transpired in the book are all fictitious, and there isn't a strain of the flu wiping out civilization as we know it right now. Although we may not have an epidemic wiping out humanity, the "survival is insufficient" motto can be applied in our daily lives right now or may have already been in effect in our lives thus far. For me personally, I've done plenty of things that I believe would fall under the umbrella of this. One example would be my current routine this summer. Every single day, except for three or four days of vacation, I have done one to two hours of Spanish studying and practice. On top of that, I meet with my previous Spanish teacher, Douglas Martin, for coffee or lunch once a week

where we communicate only in Spanish for roughly two hours. He helps correct any errors or mistakes I make, guides me on future vocabulary or grammar rules I should learn, and has been an invaluable asset to my studies this semester. I think that the opportunities and benefits granted to me by knowing another language will enrich my life forever. It is very hard work and adds plenty of frustration to my summer that would be deemed unnecessary by some of my peers, but I don't want to have a passive and lackadaisical attitude towards this goal of mine. I could tell myself that I'll "get by" with whatever I learn or encounter in my Spanish class this fall, but I know I shouldn't be content with where I am currently, that each day I should strive to better myself in some way, to take at least one more step towards my finish line.

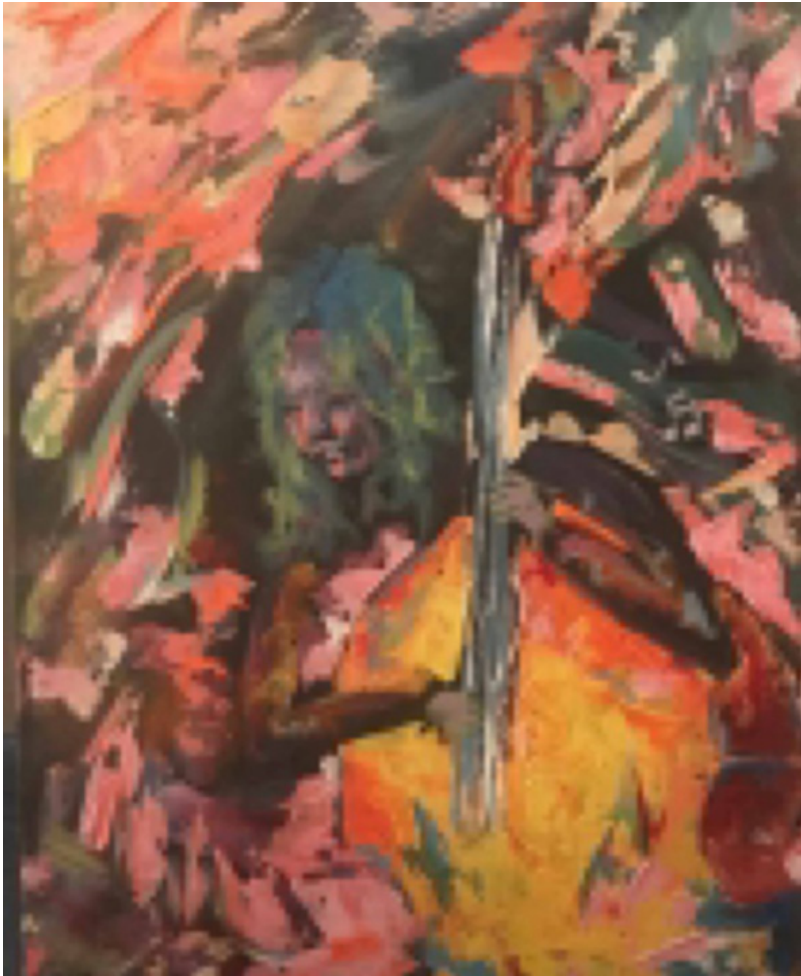
College is a wonderful opportunity to put this motto into action, which I'm sure is the reason we were assigned this particular task, book, and prompt. I'm here at the University of Tennessee to get a degree, to educate myself, to become self-sufficient, and to build lasting memories and relationships while here. I could decide that I want to do the bare necessities, getting C's in my classes, not being a part of anything on campus, not making friends, not studying abroad, and making zero effort to push myself out of my comfort zone or open up to new ideas or experiences.

I could do that, but why would I want to? I have an endless number of ways to grow as both a student and human being. I will study hard, shoot for A's in every class I can, pursue both the Spanish and French languages, study abroad, play intramural soccer, make lasting friendships, volunteer, work as an intern, grow in my Christian faith, and push my limits. It would be a shame to waste the life I was given by always opting to take the easy way out or stick to what I know and feel comfortable around. Part of the reason I chose the University of Tennessee is due to my desire to learn how to function and survive

in an environment completely unlike that of Medina, Tennessee. I'm from a small town and can function and thrive here, but I want to grow as an individual through my experiences in Knoxville, learning how to do the same in a more urban and populous area. Knoxville is an energetic and constantly evolving city, one where I must use the motto of the Traveling Symphony to fully take advantage of the opportunities that will come my way.

"Survival is insufficient" is a short and concise motto but one that holds a special significance to those in the Traveling Symphony. The motto is reinforced repeatedly throughout the course of the story in many different characters. In every single one of these instances, the decision to do more than merely eat and sleep benefited the individual in question.

While we can enjoy the motto's presence in the *Station Eleven*, it is even more applicable in the real world. Our lives are not confined to a few hundred pages in a book, and this makes me realize just how often we are presented with an opportunity to enrich ourselves and our lives through the motto's message. Every single day of my life I will be faced with opportunities to become a better version of myself in some aspect, and every single day I will make a decision to either do so or let the chance pass me by. I can only hope that as I enter this stage in my life where these decisions and opportunities become more frequent and profound, I will choose to better myself and make the most of my time here on Earth more often than I choose not to.



Alex Kail—“Her notes fill the air around her, pushing out the darkness, filling ears and minds with joy transposing to a time before the collapse. . . . The cellist brings light with every stroke, sound to silence, and color to darkness.”

Georgia Gillette

*I want a life full of finding joy in sadness, soul-reviving adventure,
and deep and passionate love for every person I meet.*

Station Eleven is a novel depicting a dystopian society succeeding the outbreak of the Georgia Flu. Before the flu got out of control, citizens had deep passions and burning interests for all things of the arts—whether that be literature, music, or acting. But, once the flu started spreading at a rapidly uncontrollable pace, residents of the town had to go into hiding, shutting themselves out from the world and all it had to offer. Fast-forward twenty years, and there are few people alive who remember what life was like before the flu. This sickness not only eradicated a profusion of townsmen but also put an end to cities, transportation, swimming, pharmaceuticals, planes, internet, and social media. Life now was looked at not by milestones or achievements in one's life, but people acquired a "before and after" viewpoint—life before the epidemic and life after.

Eventually the "Traveling Symphony" arose, which was a group of people passionate about the arts and with the desire to reintroduce their passion to the world. The Traveling Symphony traveled as free-spirited nomads, living temporarily in a variety of towns, sharing the arts through plays and other forms. The Traveling Symphony traverses in vans with the quote "because survival is insufficient" painted on it, displaying their true purpose for what they do and their motivation behind why they do it.

"Because survival is insufficient" suggests that surviving is not enough for them. They want more than the bare minimum of life—food, water, shelter, and good health. The Traveling Symphony wants a zealous life that sizzles and pops with unspeakable joy and deep love and burning passion—a full life of wonder and awe and finding

beauty, even in the broken. They want to *feel* something—not the lingering fear of sickness and death—but they want to feel *alive* by doing what they love and sharing the joy that comes from that with others.

As a young adult, I relate to this with every cell in my body. I want to do more than just live; I want to feel *alive*. Entering college, I am on the road to finding myself and discovering new passions, understanding my heart's desires, and really starting my life. I want a life full of finding joy in sadness, soul-reviving adventure, and deep and passionate love for every person I meet. I want to feel fully known by those around me. I want to be a part of something special and make the world a better place. I want to do more than just survive; I want to feel alive.

The Traveling Symphony believed that, although there was a major tragedy with the devastating epidemic, they decided to choose joy over self-pity and fear and live life to its highest potential. They did not want to waste a single day merely surviving; they chose to seize the day and live it doing what they love. I have this in common with the Symphony, as I do not want another day to go by where I am not doing what I love. Survival truly is insufficient for me, and I hope to live a life as freely and passionately as the Symphony.

Hannah Graham

We were created to explore, invent, advance, and thrive.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow published a theory that claimed all humans have an innate drive to achieve certain needs. Maslow depicted his theory in a five-tier pyramid; the initial level is to meet the basic necessities of survival—food, water, sleep, and warmth. The second is to secure safety for oneself. However, if this alone were sufficient, there would be no need for the remaining three tiers. In Emily St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven*, a ratty group of disheveled musicians and actors wander through dismembered towns, driven by the mantra “survival is insufficient.” This mantra, one of which I agree with, pushes these hopeless souls to keep searching for something more; if survival is the best that can ever be obtained, what are we even surviving for at all?

The Traveling Symphony is a symbol of hope in their dissolute world—its members plagued with the memories of electricity, travel, air conditioning, and warm beds. For most of the members, they know that there is a life superior to the one left behind by the Georgia Flu. The group is led by a caravan with the slogan “survival is insufficient” adorned on the side. To the symphony it means simply that: it is not enough just to eat, sleep, wander, repeat. They need something that drives them to carry on, to keep walking in the heat and storms.

The third tier in Maslow’s hierarchy is the need for intimate relationships, such as the symphony banding together to form a new family after disaster. The fourth is the need for a feeling of accomplishment. This band of musicians and actors was given a gift, and with their gift they can provide a brief relief from the heartache of losing loved ones or the worry of how to secure food for their families.

The symphony can act as a time machine of sorts, a short reprieve back into the world before the flu. It would be easy to simply survive in their caravans, or find a town and remain stationary. Food, water, and shelter is all that is needed to keep breathing, but what is the point of surviving if there is nothing to survive for? That is what the motto means to the Traveling Symphony; it is not enough to just survive with no drive or passion. This is a group of people that does not want to join into the towns of people lost in the mundane actions of barely achieving survival.

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style” (Maya Angelou). The federal poverty line is used by the government to determine what amount of income families need to survive. While this amount can fall short depending on various economical and physical factors, it is a good representative of what would be required to meet the basic needs of food, water, and shelter. Based on this amount, if survival alone were enough for me, I would not need to attend the University of Tennessee. However, existing is not enough; I want to thrive. I want to make my time alive count for something. I chose to further my education because I want to fearlessly follow my dreams; I want to have a purpose to waking up every morning.

Survival alone is insufficient, it’s a waste of time, space, and resources. If the only drive one holds is to float by from day to day until death, what was the reason for living? Humans were not created—whether from an ape, bacteria, meteor, or divine intervention—to solely take up space. We were created to explore, invent, advance, and thrive.

I will earn my bachelor’s degree in business, where I will go on to be a part of a sports team or major corporation, managing their public relations with their partners and sponsors. I will become a

wife and a mother—one who will teach her kids to thrive, to chase their dreams, to invent, explore, and do something worth living for. That is why I have decided to spend my next four years on Rocky Top—because I will do something great, something bigger than survival.

Libby Henderson

*This could inspire me to join clubs, meet new friends, try new things,
or pursue some sort of newfound passion.*

According to *dictionary.com*, the word *insufficient* means to be “not enough” or “inadequate.” In context with the Traveling Symphony’s use of the phrase “survival is insufficient,” this phrase takes multiple meanings. Within the Traveling Symphony were people of varying ages, some that lived before the Georgia Flu pandemic, some born after, some who could vividly remember life before the Flu, and some who could only imagine life before the Flu. Because these individuals had their own experiences and backgrounds, the motto could not have the same meaning for each member of the Symphony, which explains why certain members of the group were fonder of the statement than others.

For the ones who were born into the society after the Flu and the ones who couldn’t remember life before, the meaning of the phrase is similar to how most of the audience reading the novel *Station Eleven* would interpret it. In today’s world, we live with electricity, easily accessed transportation, a working economy, and countless other luxuries. This is the only life that we know, one of opportunity and innovation. Though this life is drastically different than that of the characters who were born into the “new world” after the Georgia Flu, we relate in that we are familiar with our lives as they’ve always been. We are comfortable with the way the world is around us because that’s what we know.

To the people that identify with this, the phrase comes across as inspirational. It expresses the idea that there is always something more we can do to enhance our lives, to progress. As a college student, I could interpret this to mean that just passing my classes and

staying alive isn't enough to fulfill my potential for a full college experience or purposeful career/future. This could inspire me to join clubs, meet new friends, try new things, or pursue some sort of newfound passion. These are things that, paired with passing classes and taking care of myself, would allow my college experience to flourish.

For the other characters, the ones that lived on both sides of the pandemic history, this quote would be interpreted differently. These characters have lived in the comfort that we have today and have been able to take advantage of the opportunities that a society—in a state such as ours—could provide. They lived with a world that was familiar. Then, those same people that lived just as we do now had their worlds completely flipped. All of a sudden, electricity and transportation weren't so accessible. Money no longer had value. The friends, families, entire communities that surrounded these people disappeared, and nothing could be done to stop it.

These people had to learn to live all over again. The governments that structured their societies were no longer available, the food that they once had unlimited access to was no longer available, the luxuries that we take for granted every day were no longer available. These people had to live in a world that they'd never imagined having to live in. To these individuals, the idea that "survival is insufficient" is rooted in hope and in tragedy.

For these characters, survival isn't adequate enough because they know what it's like to live without having to worry about survival. They know what it's like to live comfortably with water that runs when you turn a knob, planes that can take you anywhere you want to go in a matter of minutes/hours, light that comes on when they flip a switch, etc. This quote is a reminder of life before the Flu, what they once had and now only hope to gain back. It challenges these people in greater ways than those that only knew the world one way.

Going into college, this quote challenges me. As someone moving states and leaving everything/everyone that I've ever known to come to the University of Tennessee, simply surviving seems like a big enough goal to aim for. Having to step out of my comfort zone to meet new friends, find clubs to join, look for research and job opportunities, etc. is extremely overwhelming. However, if I truly desire to make the most of my experience and education at this school, or any school, I have to be willing to accept the idea that "survival is insufficient." "Adulthood" is gained through this realization. Without this challenge, I won't be successful.



Alyson Sliger—“The Traveling Symphony . . . live their lives post-collapse holding onto the things that once made them happy. The symphony performs Shakespeare plays and classical music; Clark creates the Museum of Civilization, doing what his boyfriend would have done as a way to hold on to him. . . . In the twenty years since the Georgia Flu swept through the Earth, people died off, but the art they all loved survived.”

Ariana Lee

*By keeping the arts alive, they kept the morality, innovation,
and spirit of the collapsed civilization alive as well.*

“Survival is insufficient” is a remarkably important statement in *Station Eleven* that is explored heavily through the challenges the Traveling Symphony faces. They risk their lives to bring music to people because by doing so they are preserving their humanity and the civilization they left behind. This motto is so meaningful to them because appreciating the beauty of the arts and exploring one’s passions is what makes people human. Similarly, this same motto can be applied heavily in college and thus life. Students attend college because they want more than just a degree; they want to have a career that is meaningful to them and to positively impact others.

“Survival is insufficient” is a powerful and influential motto for the Traveling Symphony because it reflects what they truly stand for: preserving humanity through the arts. They believed that merely surviving by acquiring basic necessities was not enough. Instead of taking the safer route and settling down, they risked their lives traveling across the country performing. By keeping the arts alive, they kept the morality, innovation, and spirit of the collapsed civilization alive as well. Exploring those interests is what separates man from beast and what truly keeps people together. Their committed relationship to music allowed them to have close familial bonds with each other that likely would not have been obtained had they just been together only for hunting and finding shelter.

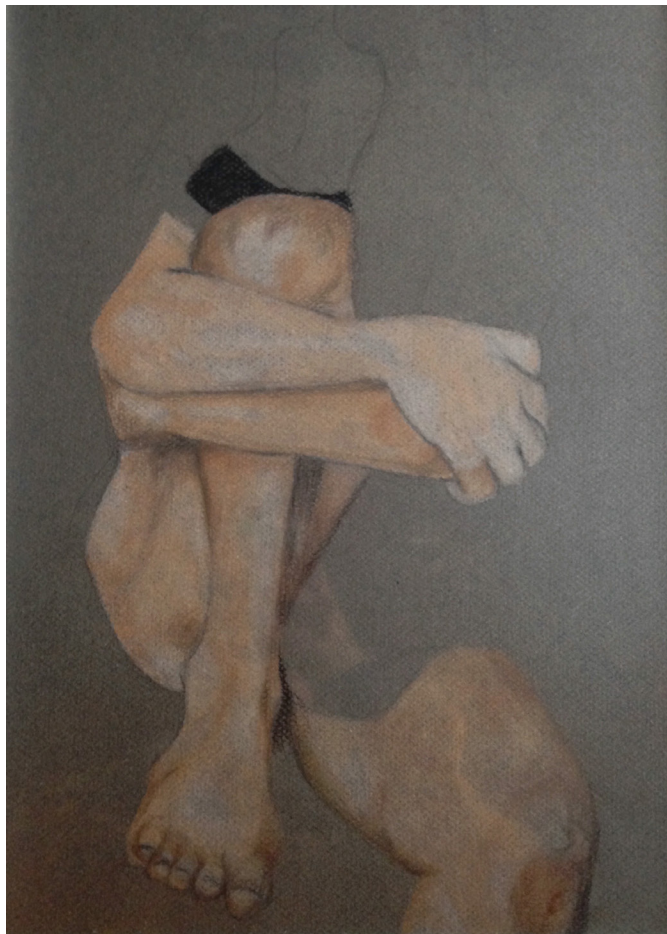
Survival is also not completely sufficient because people need the arts as an outlet. No matter how bad things can get, people need to have a way to relieve stress and to forget how bad things really are in order to retain their humanity. This idea is evident in the novel

through Kirsten carrying around the *Station Eleven* comics and her paperweight. All those items are technically useless and deadweight for survival, but she keeps them anyway because appreciating art is essential for doing more than just surviving. That is the basis behind the Traveling Symphony's motto and why they take the risks they do for achieving happiness.

From a college perspective, the statement is the embodiment of every student. College is definitely not necessary to acquire a job, but everyone is there to pursue their dreams so they can live happily. Otherwise, everyone would be content with just being a subsistence farmer and trading for the essentials.

For me, survival is insufficient because I have always wanted to help people ever since my best friend was hospitalized for several months in high school. I was heavily inspired to be like the dutiful nurses I witnessed and vowed to be just like them. In order to achieve my dreams I must attend college; however, I do not need to pursue college to technically survive. I could find a job as I am now and strictly live; but I would not be happy, and I would not be fulfilling my life goals of helping those in need, like my friend. Expecting a satisfactory life without exploring your interests and passions is not a life worth living to me.

Overall, "survival is insufficient" means remaining in touch with your humanity. The Traveling Symphony could have settled down, but they decided to travel and scavenge for instruments instead. For me, having a relevant life is similar in that I want to pursue my dreams of becoming a nurse. In both situations, the arts and a college degree are not technically needed, but it would certainly make life more fulfilling.



Michaela Thordarson—"In my drawing, I intentionally did not complete the face. I did this to show how, if I had to live in a world that lacked all kinds of art and creativity, then I would feel insufficient and not whole."

Jordan Pittman

*The edges are clean, the picture is coherent,
but it's not quite the same.*

In *Station Eleven* by Mandel, the familiar world came to an end. Throughout the book, characters are caught in the middle of what they remember from the old world to what they are actually experiencing in this new life as they know it. My creative response is meant to depict just that.

People who were old enough to remember what life was like were often the ones who felt like they had lost the most. They could remember specifics about what the world used to look like, so the reality of what was now around them and the extreme differences that were at play led to a constant struggle for some characters. And even though they were all in it together, individuals often felt very alone. So in their efforts of figuring out how to survive, they—subconsciously and consciously—started to piece together their old lives and how things used to be before the pandemic. They tried to make it look as much like the “real thing” as possible. The edges are clean, the picture is coherent, but it’s not quite the same.

In the novel, this struggle, between what was and what is, is most evidently seen with the Museum of Civilization. Old artifacts from the world are preserved and protected so people who remember can reminisce; and those too young to remember can be taught about the ways of the old world. By hanging onto what used to be, they begin to create a faulty new reality that is taped together with some holes in it—that, from the outside, seems to be falling apart. This relates back to the phrase “survival is insufficient” because it shows how—while the characters try to survive in their new environment—it’s not enough to satisfy.

Note on the Editor

Robin A. Bedenbaugh, PhD, is coordinator of library marketing and communications at the University of Tennessee Libraries. Her research addresses changes in scholarly communication and publishing, as well as new models for disseminating and evaluating academic research.

About the Contributors

ANGELA ALLRED, MS, moderated a panel discussion (“Help! S.O.S.! Mayday!”) with local emergency management professionals during Knoxville’s Big Read of *Station Eleven*.

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BRUCE MACLENNAN, PhD, is an associate professor of electrical engineering and computer science at the University of Tennessee. His research interests cross the boundaries between artificial intelligence, cognitive science, and philosophy.

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ARTHUR SMITH, PhD, is a professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Tennessee. He is the author of four full-length collections of poetry.

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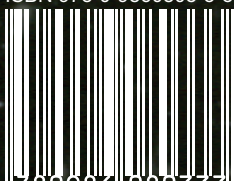
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Libby Anderson, Ashley Beckman, Marlo Black, Taylor Bogle, Emily Chapin, Elizabeth Ford, Leah Gardner, Claudia Gutierrez, Rachel Henry, Emma Hessock, Ayanna Humphrey, Alex Kail, Tram Le, Sarah Lochridge, Kat McKay, Shelly O'Barr, Jonathan Overholt, Erin Remijan, Kellie Seagraves, Alyson Sliger, Sophia Spock, Brianna Szurpicki, Michaela Thordarson, Mallory Vatter, Niki Wolf

Shelly O'Barr (MFA, University of Tennessee, 2013) is a supervisor in the University of Tennessee Libraries' Studio media production lab. All other artists were students in First-Year Studies 100 during fall semester 2017.

In fall of 2017, *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel became the talk of the town in Knoxville, Tennessee. Mandel's novel about the collapse of civilization in the aftermath of a global pandemic was the focus of two community reading programs. With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the leadership of the Knox County Public Library, Knoxville hosted a Big Read of *Station Eleven*. Likewise, the University of Tennessee selected *Station Eleven* as the Life of the Mind reading for first-year students arriving on campus that fall. *From the Remains: Reflections on "Station Eleven"* gathers creative responses—both written and artistic—that emerged from local study and discussion of the novel.

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