

Healing Reflections Project

Making Rent

by Kensie Kiesow

Summertime for a student is for days spent lying on the beach, soaking up as much of that Wisconsin summer sun as you can before winter hits. It's for long road trips to Colorado, the west coast, or maybe just a neat park nearby with pine trees that remind you of Russian spires poking the sky. It's for a break from the constant stress of exams, essays, and grades. And, it's for that summer job. Working all summer to pay for tuition, rent, groceries, and necessities when the fall semester starts up, and you are once again a student with deadlines and responsibilities. When each week is another monster of essays, projects, lab reports, and readings to be vanquished, so you can't rake in as many hours at the gas station, or the book store, or the restaurant as you could have during those three months of sunshine and freedom. The semester is when you devote your time to study and practice the skills that you will carry with you into the future, the Real World that you've dreamt about for the last twenty-two years of your life. But, the Real World is all around us, and it's expensive.

Just like every other student, whether they're in high school or in college, I simultaneously look forward to and dread going to work for as many hours as my boss will give me during the summer. The paychecks are all worth the hours of serving cranky customers and running around the store to find the exact copy of *Little Women* with whimsical art painted by a dear artist for the customer's granddaughter, but in 2020, the opportunity to work long hours and save fatter cheques in the summer was shattered by the corona virus. Instead, I was stuck in my sweaty home all day, cowering from coughing strangers, and when I did escape my hermitage to buy groceries, I scurried between the aisles with my head down and a jar of peanut butter clutched in my arms like a football player making a mad dash to the checkout line. The cost of living in Eau Claire isn't bad compared to New York or San Francisco, but when you're working part-time for a little more than minimum wage, every dollar counts.

I found myself afraid to check my bank account after the first of the month, terrified that I hadn't saved enough for rent and my balance would be negative, or I had but there wasn't enough left over to cover the utilities. I considered my groceries very carefully. I stocked up on oatmeal and rice because they were cheap and could last me a long time, and I visited my family less and less often to save the gas I needed to get me to work. I'm so thankful for my parents and their generosity because without them, I would have had to quit my internship with the Chippewa Valley Writers Guild, too. Without them, I could not have afforded my last shreds of independence.