



MARCH NEWSLETTER

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Soumaya El Joundi

Eman Khalid

Soumaya El Joundi is a 22-year-old journalist and aspiring human rights activist. Born and brought up in Morocco, Soumaya always believed in the power of writing for the right cause. Her passion for learning led her to pursue a bachelor's in English Literature with a focus on cultural studies. During her bachelor's, Soumaya developed an extra interest in journalism and media. Interning with Morocco World News, Soumaya published an extensively researched article on child marriage and the effects it had on young girls in general. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Digital Communication and Media.

Soumaya El Joundi is appointed as the President of Chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality by the Chairman of our organization and the Board of Directors. This week, we had the opportunity to speak with her about the things she aspires to pursue with Chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality and the change she aspires to bring to the Moroccan community through this wonderful initiative. Soumaya and I spoke about her childhood and how it influenced her to be the kind of person she is today. We also discussed her passion for journalism and how media can be used as an informative tool in educating the youth of today to positively impact the lives of those around them, especially those residing in the minority communities. In this interview, Soumaya expressed her passion to diminish the incorrect portrayal of women in media and what steps we can take as a community to ensure a safer society for young women and girls worldwide. We also spoke about what inspired her to join hands in this empowering initiative and what she hopes to achieve for her community in the near-future with Chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality.

In your thesis, you wrote about Child Marriage. Why do you think this issue needs to be spoken about?

Ans: As I've told you before, it started here in the Moroccan community because we do not have the proper awareness of this issue. This is called pedophilia. But people try to call it 'marriage,' which is not the case. Also, we have a misinterpretation of religions. They misinterpret things according to their likings, and they want everyone to follow them as well. We have a lot of problems coming from the misconception and misinterpretation of religion, and child marriage is one of them because child marriage is a crime against children. It is unacceptable to see these little girls as so-called 'brides' to go through all the pain and all the torture. Because they are shy and they feel as though they'd be shamed if they speak up about it because their minds are controlled. I want to be the one to make their voices heard as much as I can. I know that it is hard to change the whole society. But, I will just try to do my best. Child marriage is so striking to me, that makes me feel angry. When I was five years old, I faced a horrible and violent experience. However, I was saved at the last moment. I did not forget that moment. I was just a child, and that incident remained in my mind. Sometimes, I also have nightmares regarding that incident. But after a few years, I started becoming stronger. There are girls in this world who are raped and tortured in the ugliest way possible. That's why we should join hands, and we women, have to speak up about other women, our sisters, who can't really speak up for themselves. That incident impacted me immensely to make me call myself a 'feminist.' My definition of feminism is helping the women of my community who are going through real hardships.

Congratulations on being selected as the Head of Unity for Equality chapter Morocco. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for you and this organization. So, can you tell me a little bit about Chapter Morocco? Why did you choose Unity for Equality? What inspired you to start this initiative? Basically, what inspired you to work with Chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality?

Ans: As for Chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality, the Moroccan society has a lot of problems and phenomena. It is not what the media shows. The people in Morocco are divided into three groups. Some of us want to follow western cultures, and some of us want to follow the Russian culture. Whereas others want to follow the pure Islamic culture.

an Exclusive Interview with the Unity For Equality Morocco Chapter President



Each category has its own set of rules and traditions. Each of them has problems of their own. Another one of the issues is that we do not have enough associations and organizations in Morocco that want to contribute to the betterment of the community. People do not really want to invest in projects. In Morocco, we have rural areas, and we have people who die due to extreme cold, and they don't have enough food nor do they have enough blankets to sleep well. Having the possibility to help these people through Unity for Equality - Chapter Morocco, I will use this opportunity to help children who deserve to have a happy childhood, one devoid of poverty and hunger. My main aim is to help children, then women, then men. What I want to change in my society through Unity for Equality - Chapter Morocco is that I want to reach those people whom we really do not know about. As I've mentioned before, there are children, there are women, different people are suffering in different ways. Through the chapter Morocco of Unity for Equality, I want to help young children reach their dreams because getting a chance to working with an American organization, and studying in a good university is something that everyone deserves. If I help those people reach their dreams and impact their lives positively, those children would want to do that as well.

What steps can we take, as a community, to ensure that the voices of the voiceless are heard?

Ans: Depending upon my experiences, the first step we can take is to get the voices heard of those whose stories are not often told. We have to work on the mental health of all those people who have been affected by negativity or any kind of trauma and to educate them that they have the right to speak up. Maybe I don't have enough knowledge to speak about this topic just yet. It took me a lot of time to convince the minors to tell me about their stories of child marriage before I could write my article on child marriage. I convinced them and made them believe that they were human beings too, and they deserved the best life. If we are able to get them to utter and speak, that is how we can make the voices of the voiceless heard.

What topics would you like to discuss and explore further in your writings?

Ans: I could mention too many topics because I want to talk about a lot of things, but a few major things I really want to talk about are; sexual abuse, patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and the misinterpretation of my religion. Toxic masculinity often leads men to control women intensively and for women, it becomes hard and burdensome. Another topic that I really want to speak about is the portrayal of women in media. I always thought that Arab women are portrayed in an ill-mannered way. When you think about Arab women, you imagine her in the kitchen and doing the house chores. You imagine her as someone not being able to study. But then, I did my research on the comparison between the Eastern media and the Western media, and I discovered that the portrayal of women is not wholly true, both in the East and in the West.

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<https://www.unityforequality.org/the-latest/>

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Federica Socal

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON MARCH 8 IS A GLOBAL DAY USED TO CELEBRATE THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN. YET, AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S ALSO A CALL TO ACTION TO ACCELERATE WOMEN'S EQUALITY.

WOMEN HAVE MADE GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN RECENT YEARS. IN 2019 NASA COMPLETED THE FIRST ALL-FEMALE SPACEWALK, IN 2020 THE USA ELECTED THEIR FIRST FEMALE VICE PRESIDENT, KAMALA HARRIS, AND CURRENTLY COUNTRIES WITH FEMALE PRIME MINISTERS, SUCH AS NORWAY, FINLAND, ICELAND AND DENMARK, ARE PUTTING THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS TO SHAME WITH THEIR SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE TO COVID-19. WOMEN ARE FINALLY GETTING A SEAT AT THE TABLE. THEY ARE BEING CHEERED ON BY ROLE MODELS AND FEMINIST ICONS, AND THEY ARE UNITING TO COMBAT SEXISM, INSTEAD OF BEING PUSHED ASIDE.

TODAY, WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES THAT SOME OF THE EARLIEST FEMINIST ACTIVISTS ONLY DREAMT OF. A RADICAL CHANGE HAS STARTED, BUT THERE'S STILL A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE. WOMEN ARE STILL FIGHTING EVERY DAY FOR HEALTHCARE ACCESS, EQUAL PAY, AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS. ON TOP OF THAT, WOMEN AND GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD ARE STILL DEALING WITH ABUSE, VIOLENCE, AND ARE BEING EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION AND WORK. AND FEMALE INEQUALITY ISN'T JUST HAPPENING IN COUNTRIES, SUCH AS SUDAN, WHERE 1 IN 3 GIRLS ARE MARRIED BEFORE THEY TURN 18. IT'S ALSO HAPPENING IN COUNTRIES LIKE THE US, WHERE WOMEN SEEMINGLY HAVE IT ALL, BUT ONLY ON THE SURFACE.

IN FACT, THERE'S AN UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN ALL OF US, BROUGHT ON BY CENTURIES OF PATRIARCHY. TODAY, OPPRESSION AND PREJUDICE ARE HIDDEN, IN THE NAME OF WOKENESS, BUT THEY'RE STILL THERE. THE SAME GLASS CEILING STILL EXISTS, MEANING THAT WOMEN ARE STILL UNDERPAID, UNDERVALUED, SEXUALIZED, AND PATRONIZED. SIMILARLY, IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, WOMEN ARE STILL CONTINUALLY BEING PUT IN CHARGE AFTER A CRISIS, SO THAT WHEN THEY INEVITABLY FAIL,



THEIR FAILURE WILL BE A FAILURE FOR ALL WOMEN. THIS WAS THE CASE FOR MARISSA MAYER, WHO WAS MADE CEO OF YAHOO IN 2014 AFTER IT LOST MARKET SHARES TO GOOGLE, AND IT WAS THE CASE FOR THERESA MAY, WHO IN 2016 BECAME THE UK'S PRIME MINISTER, AFTER THE BREXIT REFERENDUM CAUSED THE VALUE OF THE POUND COIN TO DROP SIGNIFICANTLY.

BECAUSE OF COURSE, WHEN A MAN FAILS IS JUST THAT MAN, BUT WHEN A WOMAN FAILS, ALL WOMEN ARE UNFIT FOR THAT POSITION. WHEN MEN ARE SUCCESSFUL, THEY ARE AMAZING, YET WHEN WOMEN ARE SUCCESSFUL, THEY ARE UNLIKABLE. WHEN MEN ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES, THEY ARE BRAVE, YET WHEN WOMEN DO SO, THEY ARE ARROGANT.

THESE DOUBLE STANDARDS ARE ABSOLUTELY RIDICULOUS, BUT THEY STILL EXIST. I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER GONE A FULL DAY WITHOUT HEARING A SEXIST COMMENT FROM A STRANGER, CO-WORKER, OR FAMILY MEMBER. THEY ARE CASUALLY THROWN OUT BY THOSE KINDS OF MEN WHO SAY THAT ALL WOMEN REALLY WANT IS A RICH HUSBAND, AND THOSE WHO STILL LAUGH AT RAPE JOKES IN THE LOCKER ROOM. AND IT'S FRUSTRATING TO HAVE TO HEAR MEN TELL US THAT WE'RE BEING TOO SENSITIVE, WHEN THEY ARE THE ONES WHO NEED TO CHANGE THEIR BELIEFS.

GREAT CHANGE HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN OUR HISTORY, YET THERE'S A LOT THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. BUT WOMEN ARE POWERFUL AND RELENTLESS, AND WE ARE STILL HOPEFUL THAT OUR FUTURES WILL HOLD TRUE EQUALITY.

World Poetry Day 2021

Jennifer Brooks

More than any other form of literature, there is something strangely intimidating about poetry. Unlike fiction, which often aims to be as clear as possible, for many of us, the obscurity and hidden meanings within poems can be so off-putting that once we've graduated from high school, a lot of us are reluctant to even read it. But, if we shut ourselves off from poetry entirely, we are losing access to an art form that has so much to say about humankind, including what unites us, and what diverts us as a species. This is something that World Poetry Day aims to remind us of; to rekindle within us an appreciation of poetry, and to show us all the possibilities of what it can become.

In my opinion, one of the main reasons why we find poetry so unappealing stems from how it was taught in schools. When analyzing them, we were often taught to follow a formulaic mark-scheme, in order to get the grades we needed. To this end, we knew that as long as we wrote words like "iambic pentameter," and "enjambment," on our exam papers, the examiners would be happy. However, in the real world, when we no longer have our teachers to guide our interpretations, it's no wonder that many of us give up; we simply don't understand how to read it.

However, if we are waiting to be taught how to read poetry, we are missing the point of it. Poems are designed to be interpreted differently. What resonates with you might be missing entirely for someone else, and that's okay. It's okay if you find a particular stanza disarmingly funny, even if somebody else finds it heartbreakingly sad. This doesn't mean you haven't understood the poem; it just means you're finding your own understanding of it and finding out what it means for you.

You may also find yourself repelled by poetry if you think it's old-fashioned. Again, this might be because at school we were primarily taught classics, such as Shakespeare's sonnets. Even though classic texts still have a lot to say about human emotion, poetry has progressed a lot since they were written, in new and exciting ways. In fact, according to an article by the United Nations, this is something that days like World Poetry Day aim to champion. To "foster the convergence between poetry and other arts such as theatre, dance, music, and painting," to prove that poetry isn't stagnant, old, and dusty. It's a boundary pushing, creative ball of energy, that we'd be very wise to fully appreciate.

So how can we celebrate World Poetry Day 2021? According to an article by Penguin, one way would be to watch a poetry reading on Penguin Books UK's YouTube page. Hearing poets perform their work out loud can add real depth to the piece, especially as hearing their tone of voice can shape its meaning. Or, if you'd prefer, have a browse through the many journals you can access through the internet, such as Streetcake Magazine, which champions innovative and experimental poetry.

Finally, if you're feeling brave, why not have a go at writing a poem yourself? Don't worry about it being perfect, as poetry rarely is. It is far more important that it is raw, and from the heart. According to Danez Smith, the winner of the Forward Prize 2018 for his collection *Don't Call Us Dead*, "our best writing comes from when we are honest with ourselves and when we're willing to push ourselves and take risks." So, when World Poetry Day comes around on March 21st, let's do just that. Let's push ourselves to discover how liberating and transformational this art form can truly be.



The Devastating Effects of Long COVID-19

by Federica Soccia

For a lot of people who become infected with Coronavirus, the disease is very unpleasant, but after a couple of weeks it gets better. But, for an unfortunate minority, the symptoms linger. This is the reality of long COVID; a syndrome that follows the initial virus. The patient is no longer infectious, the COVID test is negative, but they are still dealing with debilitating symptoms, such as fatigue, muscle weakness and brain fog, for months after they became infected.

According to a recent UK study, for around 1 in 5 people, COVID symptoms last longer than 5 weeks, and for 1 in 10, symptoms linger for longer than 12 weeks. Nonetheless, the cause of long COVID is still largely debated, and there are no definitive answers. However, there are hypotheses. Some believe COVID-19 can damage the mitochondria, which are cells that are responsible for producing energy in the human body. However, another theory includes the idea that in some cases, the antibodies our bodies need to get rid of the virus can turn on the host and trigger an autoimmune disease. However, although no one can give a clear-cut reason as to what causes it, the disease is likely to be brought on by a combination of multiple different factors.

Nonetheless, because long COVID is so poorly understood, for a long time it was not recognized by healthcare professionals. Doctors, overwhelmed by the pandemic, often told patients that it was all in their heads and was probably caused by anxieties about lockdown. With nowhere else to turn, dismissed patients looked for help on social media platforms, and joined online support groups in order to share their stories and to raise awareness of the disease.

However, now the healthcare system has recognized the reality of long COVID, numerous researchers are trying to get a better understanding of the illness. This includes raising awareness of the risk factors, which include: being of an older age, having excess weight, and being severely affected by the initial infection. Nonetheless, more surprisingly, data also shows that long COVID seems to be more prevalent in women and young people, and often affects people who were very fit before they got infected. Since these people had a lower risk of becoming seriously ill from the initial disease, they are the ones who have been expected to continue working in front line positions. But the fact that they have now been identified as having a bigger risk of developing long COVID, proves that there is still a lot we are yet to learn about the disease itself.

Doctors suggest that patients suffering from long COVID should keep active whenever they can, but they should “stay in their energy window,” and not push themselves too hard. As for actual treatments, the research is still ongoing. But, in these times of uncertainty, all we can do is keep social distancing and keep following government guidelines. We need to keep being responsible for everyone’s safety.





MARCH 2021

An anniversary since lockdown 2020

This coming month marks an important, if distressing anniversary: a year since the world went into lockdown, due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Since the outbreak of the virus, more than 80 million have been infected, at least 1.7 million have died, and none of us have been able to spend time with our loved ones without strict social distancing measures being in place. Schools and universities have had to close, healthcare workers have been left exhausted and traumatized, and the economy has taken a hit like no other, with nearly 10 million Americans out of work within the first few weeks of lockdown. So, it's safe to say this year has been unparalleled. Yet, it still shows no sign of slowing down.

When lockdown began a year ago, we had no idea how long measures would be in place for. But I'm sure that none of us expected that a year later, we would still have restrictions. Yet, now again, we have to be especially careful due to the fact that the virus has now mutated. According to the CDC, these variants include B.1.1.7 which has been detected in the UK, the US, and Canada; 1.351, which has emerged in South Africa; and P.1, in Brazil. Although there is no evidence that these mutations are deadlier than the original virus, they are far more contagious, and healthcare providers are feeling the strain of more and more hospitalizations, despite limited resources to go around.

This being said, although 2020 has been exhausting, lonely, and stagnant, it has also taught us a lot too. Due to the fact that we have been forced to stay indoors, a lot of us have had no choice but to be alone with our own thoughts and emotions. After all, it's not like we had anywhere to go to distract ourselves from them. Therefore, although most people's mental

health has understandably taken a hit, we are also finally being honest with ourselves, and leaning on each other for emotional and mental support, instead of bottling it up as we would normally.

Similarly, even though we are currently living through one of the worst possible scenarios imaginable, we've also learned that we can adapt. We've learned that if our world has been turned upside down, our daily routines have been disrupted, and we're unable to spend time with our loved ones, we'll adjust; whether this means doing school or work online, or skying friends instead of going out with them.

We've learned just how resilient we can be, even in the face of adversity, which is a skill we can take with us throughout the pandemic and beyond. After all, even if life isn't perfect, we will always find a way to make it so. Finally, even if life isn't back to normal just yet, we have every reason to look forward to the future, especially as vaccines are slowly being introduced. Although according to a CNN article by Deirdre McPhillips, it could still take a very long time for enough of the population to be vaccinated for normal life to resume, we definitely have a reason to hope that one day everything will go back to normal. Even if we still have to be patient, and maintain the same social distancing measures we have been following since the pandemic began. So, even though this isn't the anniversary anyone would particularly want to celebrate, we do have reason to celebrate what we've learned from this awful situation, and how we can grow from it when all of this is over. We'll get through this eventually, so let's keep going and keep holding tight until we do.

By Jennifer Brooks

5 Must Watch Movies for Spring and Summer 2021

by Abheek Singh

With COVID restrictions still dragging, I'm sure a lot of us are feeling a bit deflated at the moment, especially as normality is still a long way off. That being said, there are still things to look forward to, including the exciting cinema that is coming out very soon. Every one loves a good movie, so keep reading to find out 5 of the most anticipated films coming out in Spring and Summer 2021.

1. Free Guy

The first movie to look out for is "Free Guy," starring Ryan Reynolds. The film was supposed to make its debut in 2020, but due to COVID concerns, it's instead due to be released in the US on May 21. The movie is about a bank teller, called Guy, who realizes he is in a video game called Free City. Perfect for those of you who love action-packed comedies!

2. Space Jam: A New Legacy

For those of you who are feeling nostalgic, the live-action sports comedy "Space Jam: A New Legacy" is coming out on July 16. The movie is a sequel to "Space Jam," which came out in 1996, and was about the legendary basketball player Michael Jordan getting abducted by Bugs Bunny. However, in this version it's LeBron James who teams up with the cast of Looney Tunes. We hope you're as excited as we are about this long-awaited classic.

3. Minions: The Rise of Gru

If you're a fan of Despicable Me, this one is for you. "Minions: The Rise of Gru," coming out on July 2, is a prequel to Gru's rise in power, and tells the story about how he gained a loyal following from the Minions. It's a perfect film to watch with the kids, or for those of us who just want to relive our childhood.

4. In the Heights

For those that are more into feel-good musicals, "In the Heights," is coming out on June 18. The movie is the feature version of the hit Broadway musical, and is about a bodega owner, who is conflicted about retiring to the Dominican Republic, after he inherits a fortune off his Grandmother. It's both sun-soaked and glorious, and is guaranteed to put a smile on anybody's face.

5. Cinderella

Finally, our last, long-awaited movie is Cinderella, which is expected to come out on July 16. Granted, there have been many, many revivals of the Disney classic over the years. But this remake is modern, musical and has a stellar cast, which includes Camilla Cabello and the legendary Broadway actor Billy Porter. What could go wrong?

So, we hope you're as excited as we are about all these films, and if you see them in theatres, be sure to wear a mask and maintain social distancing. Enjoy!



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