

Going Into the Hospital: COVID 19 (Poem) by Sriram Shamasunder

Going into the hospital: COVID 19

When I walk out the door these days

For a shift in the hospital

Two small people cry at the door

My daughter and son.

4 and 1 1/2

Tears fall

big drops against their full brown cheeks

My first inclination is to dismiss their dramatics

I will be back soon

They are on one side of the door

And I am on the other

And they would much rather be on the same side of the door

Rumpling through the leaves on the Oakland sidewalk

Taking a long walk around the neighborhood

To visit a Japanese oak,

Or a fennel bush

Or a neighbor who may unexpectedly peak out their window.

It is their immediate acknowledgment that they would rather be with their father

Wherever he may be going and whatever that might bring

When I head into the hospital

I am aware that any missteps of face to mouth or
by poor luck or chance could pull me away from
seeing my two lovelies grow up

I can picture myself as one of my patients

trying to catch their breath like trying to catch a bus that's too far ahead

Breathing like you sprinted a mile and another mile

your breath won't slow

The fear that creeps in.

And isn't this how's it's always been

Life as fragile as a leaf hanging on a tall tree about to tumble to earth
in autumn

And to be apart

May mean to be apart longer than anyone may have predicted

And to be apart now

May cost us our lives

What I am learning from my two little ones:

give in to the jubilant joy of being with the ones we love

And mourn when they are not near

What could be more honest?

Or more important

My loves

For more context on the work Dr. Shamasunder and the HEAL Initiative are involved with on the ground in Navajo Nation check out these links:

Three minute segment on NBC evening news live

On Democracy Now

UCSF Press Release

ABC nightly News on story in Navajo Nation