

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Love in the Time of COVID-19

A Community Poem for Healthcare Workers and Other Frontliners

Our loved ones have proven their immense bravery, at times volunteering to care for those sick and putting their own lives at risk.

This poem is for all the people who work so we can be safe at home. We love you to the moon and back.

Your voice holds me
when your arms cannot.

You spoke calming words to me
as I slipped into sleep

And yours were the first eyes I saw
as I came out from under the fog

Wingless angels dressed in scrubs,
footfall on our steps,

a tap on the window,
a neighbor's wave,

a newly-sewn mask tossed
(in a plastic bag), to the front

of the door: "run it through the washer
first," she calls, waves, and departs.

(Fifteen years ago, at fifteen,
just arrived from El Salvador,

she walked into my Jefferson High
ESL class. Today, she is a hero,

daily risking her life for her patients,
while her own children wait

in their fog-shrouded home.)
Earth angels, haloes shining bright,

working with this virus in the air!
We will not despair

You support us
You surround us

Because of you, the world
will get brighter,

socially un-distancing.
Bless the arms that hold you today.

We're all joining hands,
guests on this planet,

across many lands.
We are forever grateful

to the warriors who save lives.
Time to recognize the real heroes,

brilliant shadows, as we've never
seen before. God calls us

to opportunity, it is for each
of us to claim. Our neighbor

is our brother, is our sister,
is our keeper, is our healer.

As soldiers, you stand tall,
ready for the next patient who calls.

Your love and care exemplify
heroism without compare.

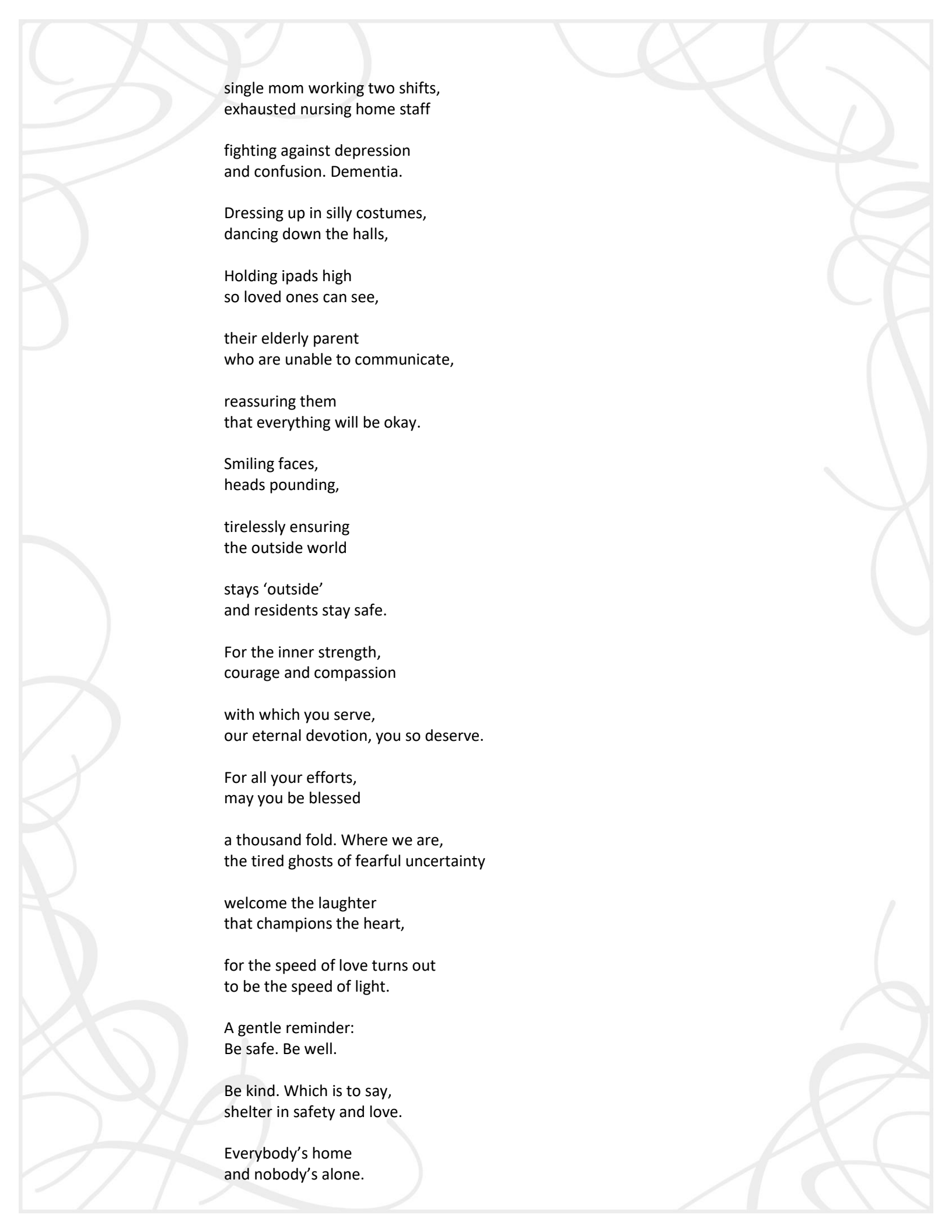
Without you, our country would be
facing an even larger catastrophe.

Doctors and nurses and other
frontliners, with help to give.

Some deliver goods,
some clean and scrub,

stock the shelves,
and work so hard

so we can stay in our space.
You can do it, you can make it,



single mom working two shifts,
exhausted nursing home staff

fighting against depression
and confusion. Dementia.

Dressing up in silly costumes,
dancing down the halls,

Holding ipads high
so loved ones can see,

their elderly parent
who are unable to communicate,

reassuring them
that everything will be okay.

Smiling faces,
heads pounding,

tirelessly ensuring
the outside world

stays 'outside'
and residents stay safe.

For the inner strength,
courage and compassion

with which you serve,
our eternal devotion, you so deserve.

For all your efforts,
may you be blessed

a thousand fold. Where we are,
the tired ghosts of fearful uncertainty

welcome the laughter
that champions the heart,

for the speed of love turns out
to be the speed of light.

A gentle reminder:
Be safe. Be well.

Be kind. Which is to say,
shelter in safety and love.

Everybody's home
and nobody's alone.

About the project – from Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetto:

A few days after the six Bay Area counties issued the mandate to shelter-in-place, my NextDoor community mobilized to find ways to support each other. A few people started yard-based neighborhood pantries stocked with food and other personal care items, others offered to run errands for their elderly and disabled neighbors (within days, almost a hundred people had signed up to shop, pick up meds, cut grass, and do other chores for those who need help), and there were those who gave away N95 masks and homemade masks. Some people in the community also posted poems to log their days and cope with the anxiety and uncertainty brought on by self-isolation, unemployment or other pandemic concerns.

Around that time, I was in the process of curating poems on “Sheltering” from poets from across the US and around the world. I suggested to my NextDoor neighbors that we create a community poem for our frontliners, and for every line that will be submitted, a dollar will be donated to the San Mateo County Health Foundation’s COVID-19 support for San Mateo County hospitals and clinics. As of April 10th, I received a total of 125 lines from people from all around the county, which I had put together into this poem.

Contributors to this poem:

Supervisor Carole Groom, Terry Adams, Lisa Anderson, Ginnie Backes, Jay Thomas Beard, Michelle Brcko, Jackie Burleigh, Judy Campbell, Patricia Delara, Debbie Diaz, Rev. Terri Echelbarger, Paul Fericano, Ivana Hansen, Diane Hendrix, Teresa Kelly, Heidi Leupp, Veronica Montes, Carol Mukhopadhyay, Amy Pabalan, Ann Powers, Tony Press, Diana Ross, Lyla Strauss, Sherri Sunahara, and Craig Wiesner

With special thanks to Tanya Beat and Birgit Eeckman for helping spread the word.

Curated by Aileen Cassinetto

**For every line submitted, a dollar was donated to the San Mateo County Health Foundation’s Covid-19 support for San Mateo County Hospitals and clinics.*

About our Poet Laureate:

Aileen Cassinetto began her two-year term as Poet Laureate of San Mateo County on January 1, 2019. In her first year, she visited 14 communities in the county, launched her “Speak Poetry” campaign, gave over 50 readings around the Bay Area, and promoted her events on NBC Bay Area and PenTV, and publications such as The Six Fifty, Half Moon Bay Review, and New York-based Cagibi Magazine. She has collaborated with other poets to help raise awareness on issues such as women’s rights, environmental protection, prevention of cruelty to animals, rehabilitation of prisoners through poetry, and mental health and suicide prevention. She has recently called for poems on “sheltering” and within two weeks received over 90 poems from 46 poets from across the U.S. and around the world. She believes these poems give shape to what we shelter and why. To find out more, go to: <https://migozine.org/2020/03/18/sheltering/>