

Commemorative Poem for the 500,000 Lost - by Angie Trudell Vasquez, Madison Poet Laureate

Dispatches from Radar Hill - February 28, 2021

For the bus driver on his shift who left and never came back.

For the nurse who beat breast cancer but not Covid.

For her colleagues who remember that every time a Billy Joel song came on
she'd pump her fist in the air and scream 'Billy' with joy and pure fan fury,
for the receptionist who carries on with the fist pumping and shouts in her name.

For her co-worker who told the story to us at her virtual funeral.

For our elders in nursing homes who gave and gave to their friends and family, their community
buying all the Girl Scout cookies on the block, saving money for their grandkids birthdays –
who will miss their own in 2021.

For the teachers who taught until they could not, for their students who struggled to learn with
them online.

For the parents who remain after, after so hard without your best friend, ally, accomplice there
with you by your side an island snoring each night.

For those who lost their best friend and never got to say goodbye,
or goodbye was a 2x4 inch screen, this the last time you saw them alive.

For the widows who take poetry workshops three days after their love dies.

For those who remain carry the name, the people who remember their words,
wit, wisdom, how they were scratch cooks, made chicken curry and rice,
fry bread and pinto beans, sweet potato pie, peach cobbler,
took turns driving the kids to practice, stomped puddles in rain...

Remember, remember, light a candle, say a prayer, a blessing
some funny thing they said when alive when you laughed so hard you cried,
but you didn't, that was a road trip a family vacation when the back seat
smelled less than fresh after a drive through the desert without air conditioning.

These are the days of our lives and to those who loved and lost. This poem is for you, for me.

Let us mourn all those we loved who no longer breathe this spring air, or get to see their first
Robin this season. The world is a lovely place when you care and have skin in the game, and
harbor a secret love in your heart for all things full of color, sound and feathers, soft sheets,
chocolate ice cream, puppy breath, baby chuckles, your face in the morning, in the mirror
smiling back so alive.