

A Song for the Caregivers

By Ariana Capptauber, for Yom Kippur Yizkor 5784/2023

This is for the caregivers
Who gave us their time
Their money
Their ears their eyes
Their hands their hearts their souls
Their stories

Who gave us their understanding, their wisdom
The little tricks they knew
The tidbits passed down through generations
An invaluable locket
Of no actual monetary value
To be opened at the right time,
Finding within just what was needed:
A lock of hair, a pill, a key

This is for the caregivers
Who gave when they didn't know how
When they had nothing left
Who broke into emergency stores
Who found their last reserves
In an emergency break glass
They broke and broke and broke
So that we may live

This is for the Caregiver
Capitol C
Who created us out of love, out of longing
Because it was either that or be the entire universe, alone, forever
Then was stuck taking care of us
When we were an entire race of
Ignorant babies, destructive toddlers, rebellious teenagers,
surly young adults, exhausted older adults, cranky elders

A delight to watch
Grow and become and destroy
Everything, ruin everything
Exasperating,
But un-leaveable
To whom we pray
Please, stay

This is for the parents
The mothers and the fathers and surrogate this and donor that
Who made us with their blood and flesh,
Who carried us in their bodies
Depleting their own bones so we could be
For the parents, and the step this and adoptive that
Who stood still and let us hurl ourselves against them
Over and over
Who let us explore their lives and bodies
Taking them apart and putting them back together
Upside down.
Who cleaned up when we made a mess with our toys or our lives
Who were there with hugs or milk or small miracles
To make it better

This is for the caregivers

This is for the grandparents who spoiled us
Who giggled over us and withheld their spankings
Who held our hands when our parents were gone or too dang tired
Who let us sit on their stooped, arthritic shoulders
Who offered us bits their history like lollipops
With light in their eyes
Hoping to become immortal

This is for the aunts and uncles and cousins and extended family
Who pinched our cheeks and took us away,
Or took over, took us in

Teaching us our ways, our food, our culture, our history, ourselves
How to linger, how to love

This is for the siblings who raised us, from above or below
Yanking us up by the hair
Up two inches higher to the level of their own meager, mature experience
Who waged wars that made us stronger
Whose laughter was the healing balm on our burns

This is to the children we cared for
Who took our care and grew it into a life,
Nothing short of a miracle
Nothing short of a disaster
Who sucked our teets dry, our bank accounts drier
But who found ways to refill the well
Who turned around and cared for us
In ways we least expected but most needed
Buying a ticket or sharing a memory or planting a kiss or asking a question
Just the right question

This is for the caregivers
Their support is below us and above us
Within us and all around us

This is for the teachers
In the schoolhouses and the streets
Prepping and sweating and improvising
Coffee cups and run-down red pens
Smiles and new technologies just so we could have a
Cozier, cooler, more accessible environment
In which to embark down the path they were drawing out
A path we never would have known
We wanted to take
Catching the paper planes and questions hurled at them
Returning them with a flick of the wrist
Chalk on the board rising and then settling

Until the dust had cleared and it all made sense
And a piece of the world became ours

This is for the healers,
For the doctors and the nurses
And the therapists and hospice workers and chiropractors and pharmacists
and acupuncturists and nutritionists and doula midwives,
the witchy sooth-sayers and tincture brewers and online advice givers
To your wisdom, hard earned and vital
Applied to our broken bodies
Our tangled thinking
Directing us and giving the best care you could muster
Even when our stubborn hearts and unbending bones wouldn't listen
This is for the caregivers
Who brewed our tea and pushed our pills and wiped our butts and found us
a provider who would take our insurance,
Easing us out of bed and into the shower
When we just couldn't
When the world just wouldn't
Who listened to our questions
Who listened to our homemade answers
Who listened
Who listened
Who listened.

This is for the public servants
Governors, legislators, judges, librarians, administrators, accountants,
bureaucrats
Who pore over those demanded, detested documents
To make sense of our society
Who take the refuse of our abuse
Our lack of appreciation when things work
Our tirades when they don't
And grow from it flowers, forrests
Who catch insults like fly balls to outfielders
Throwing them back at us

Showing us who we are

This is for the defenders of the public,
Who provide protection legal and military,
Who fight fires and crimes, injustice local and global
Laying their lives on the line for ours
For whom we pray, in good times and bad
That they may have the vision and insight to help those in need
With nuance
To serve and to protect and never to trample life

This is for the farmers and farmworkers
Who plant and pull and pluck
Who tend so tenderly
Coaxing from the earth
Yellows and greens and reds and purples
A rainbow of nutrients
Alimentation for our muscles and our minds
Whose toil in the hot sun
Is too often unnoticed at our tables of bounty

This is for the builders and maintenance workers
Who hold up the spaces we inhabit
Thank you for risking life and limb to make beautiful buildings
Towers we can admire and ride up fast in high-speed elevators with
high-speed internet
Thank you for taking out the trash that day
And for refilling the water cooler
And bringing me a tissue box just days before
I broke down crying
Thank you for building that lovely picture window
Onto the garden you care for
I love to look out and see the bunnies eating the getting-long grass
That you will soon mow

This is for the clergy

The priests and imams, the rabbis and reverends, monks and nuns
Pastors and preachers all
The chaplains wandering the hospital halls
Offering answers where there are none
Pulling back the curtain to help us find that God was already there
To the clergy who hold tradition in their hands
And then hold our hands
And walk us through its wisdom
Sometimes leading us astray but always trying
To bring us close
This is for the holy souls
Who sat with us on couches of birth and mourning and transformation
And listened
And listened
And listened.

This is for the caregivers
To the named and many more unnamed
You are not praised enough,
you can never be praised enough

To those who take care of us:
To those for whom we have cared:
A million times thank you,
A million times thank you,
For our existence, for our wellbeing, for our knowing, for our lives.
To all those who take care, please, take care.
To you we dedicate our loving, our suffering,
Our short lived heartaches and longer lived joys
Our whole lives
Lifted up in our hands like a dove
Here take it, catch it
Before it flies away