



Pride vs Anxiety

By Sunandhini Pattabhiraman

"I carry her
beneath
the window,
watching
her moonlit
palm
open
and close
like a tiny
folded
map,

each line
a path that leads
where I can't go,
so that I read her palm

not knowing
what I read

and
walk with her
in moon light
on the landing,
not knowing
with whom I walk,
making
invisible prayers
to go on
with her
where I can't
go,
conversing
with so many
unknowns
that must know her
more intimately
than I do.
And so to these
unspoken shadows

and this broad night

I make

a quiet

request

to the

great parental

darkness

to hold her

when I cannot,

to comfort her

when I am gone,

to help her learn

to love

the unknown

for itself,

to take it

gladly

like

a lantern

for the way

before her,

to help her see

where ordinary
light will not help her,
where happiness has fled,
where faith
cannot reach."

This is an excerpt from a touching poem by David Whyte. As my daughter slipped out of me some 24 years ago, I was encompassed in sheer joy. I remember having many conversations with her, while she unfolded inside me. But never once did I think then, about a choice of career for her. And then she grew up to be a doctor.

Like everyone else, I too am grappling with the fear of catching the COVID-19, leading a new normal way of life of washing hands, wiping down door handles, and following physical distancing practices. But I also belong to an exclusive group of mothers, who have their children working in the healthcare industry. I say this in a very broad sense to include doctors, nurses, cleaners, and other hospital staff.

Many good friends and family have messaged me to check how my daughter is coping or expressing their appreciation for all that she is doing as a medical professional at this point in time. However, basking in such pride never seems to be for any perceptible period of time. Very quickly, it is replaced with anxiety. I find myself advising her on

how to build up her immunity and checking if she is eating healthy and staying fit; something I had stopped doing since the first couple of years of her university days. She, of course, continues doing what is business as usual for her. And then I think to myself that all that advice may be redundant, she being a doctor herself! So I switch my attention to checking on her hospital scenario. I question her on how bad the hospital is (there is no chance of a good scene now, is it?). I inquire about the availability of protective gear for everyone. I check on her working shifts. And so on and so forth....

Some of these questions are raised every day. Some are modified while some are replaced with new ones. I think I understand all her answers. But I haven't. I probably heard her, but not listened attentively, as my mind is swarming with more relentless questions. I know it will be a matter of time before a cure to treat the virus can be identified instead of just treating the symptoms as is happening now. With so many unknowns about this infection, I wonder about the long term effects it may have on otherwise healthy and fit people, especially young adults like her.

Yet, she answers me patiently. She appears confident now. She reassures me that she will be sensible and careful. She says this is what she signed up for. She is fully aware of the implications. She is doing what is expected of her. And she will be fine, even if she succumbs to it. She is not going to back off. By now, she has started to slowly use these times as a good learning opportunity for her career. No medical professional

would have signed up for this. And yet, they have been given this opportunity now. Whether it is getting involved in drug trials or treatment protocols, it is a good time to enrich oneself, I agree.

I try to grasp it all. Most times after my conversations with her, I feel she will be fine, whatever the situation. I take a deep breath and tell myself that all will be well. It has been five weeks now of her working on the COVID wards in her hospital. It has been amber or red, the codes given to the wards depending on whether the patients have tested positive or not. As I end the day, I feel a little tired, churning so much in my mind. I go to sleep with hope, trust, and faith in the grace of the universe, only to wake up to another similar day.

Just a day in my life over the past weeks....

