"Father" and "Rhinoviruses in the Anthropocene" [two poems]

Maria Rouphail
North Carolina State University, retired, mgr@ncsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive

Recommended Citation
Rouphail, Maria (2020) ""Father" and "Rhinoviruses in the Anthropocene" [two poems]," Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive/vol5/iss2/8

This Poem is brought to you for free and open access by theRepository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine by an authorized editor of theRepository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu.
"Father" and "Rhinoviruses in the Anthropocene" [two poems]

Cover Page Footnote
These poems, "Father" and "Rhinoviruses in the Anthropocene," have already been accepted by the Journal and are due to be published soon. This submission constitutes a revision of these poems, and I send them pursuant to my email conversation with Julia Brown. Many thanks! Maria Rouphail, Ph.D.

This poem is available in Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive/vol5/iss2/8
Father

Was it the infant you cradled in your arms
Was it the milky breath of baby hair
Was it her feathered eyelashes
Was it her closed eyes rocking like little boats in the sea of sleep
Was it her lips parted in sleep, the flickering smile
Was it her fingertips you kissed as she slept
Was it her toes
Was it the fevers and fluxes in the middle of the night
Was it the songs you sang in the car
Was it the bedtime stories
Was it your daddy jokes
Was it her toothless giggle
Was it her birthday shoes, the pizza party
Was it the new sled
Was it the first day of school, the kindergarten graduation
Was it the fact you could not save your child
    that made you remember and remember and remember?

Each memory a torment, each a lash against the heart.
And surely the mute adolescent anger, the rage and the rifle
of a boy’s stalking darkness you could not foresee, against which
you could give no safety, obliterating your light on that December day.

Even the President wept.

Was it all of that, father? And the torpor of the nation
the shameless torpor of us, with the rants of squalid men
which caused the earth to fall finally and forever from its axis
and made grief take you down into its cave
to crush you?
Rhinoviruses in the Anthropocene

How they lie in wait for us, invisible as snipers.
At the airport, say. On laptops slipped
from hand to hand through TSA, and on the plane.

How, searching for my seat (of course, it was in-between),
I waded through somebody’s sneeze.
As the slats and flaps cranked out for take-off,

my row mate hacked his lungs onto the seat-back.
Oh yes, I’m sure he was the one, the Trojan passenger,
(though I take into account that he, too, was a victim).

How the swarming mist-borne nanoparticles platooned
from his nasal passages into mine, and pitched their RNA
on the moist loam of my palate.

How these smallest of colonizers planted their victory flags
at the entries of my sinuses, their battle drums thundering in my skull.
On the third day, I was done for, a conquered citadel.

How my fever came to seem to me a fractal
in a larger symmetry of delirium of the earth in this age,
with its human-induced inflammations and infections—

and earth’s immunological feedback of fire, flood, and cyclone wind.
How it is the germ’s will to expand, bud, and bloom.
And the host, resilient for a time, might not be the better for surviving.