

*How sad to me is spring's arrival,
Season of love, when all's in bud!
What languid tumult, what upheaval
Disturb my soul, disturb my blood!
With what a heavy, tender feeling
I revel in the season, breathing
The vernal wind...*

Eugene Onegin - Alexander Pushkin

Like a febrile patient on a respirator, our nation now burns and convulses. People march, and there is some rioting too. Property goes up in flame, and the police, fearful, are forced to the front lines. There they lob canisters of gas, bringing more tears and breathlessness - to a season of tears and breathlessness.

George Floyd, like so many others, will not breathe *the vernal wind*. In this bitter season, a *disproportionate* number of Latino and Black people have also taken their last breath. Death-by-cop or death-by-Covid, the numbers seem to trace the arc of race in this country. And already for some time now in Spanish Harlem, ICE had been knocking at our doors, separating mother from child. Up here in the wake of the pandemic, hardworking people have been spun out of jobs or are recast, with no intended irony, as *essential workers* - our *dependable expendables* - many undocumented, who stoically keep the rest of us clothed and fed.

Such sorrow comes as no surprise to us. The East Harlem School at Exodus House was founded over a quarter of a century ago in response to a separate and unequal education system that yet persists. Our nation's schools for the poor share the same lineage as redlining - and "health" system disparities that, especially in this season, steal people away from those who love them. Despite national reform movements, schools remain breeding grounds for mediocrity and morbidity. Too many are penitential places where the food is wretched, sports and fitness are an afterthought, and a liberal arts education is a punch line. Places where children are pushed to grow toward obsolescence, obesity, and untimely death. **Fact:** obesity is posited as greatest risk for death in this season of Covid.

Decades ago, we had our opium wars and an opioid crisis here (then labeled ghetto dysfunction), while at the same time too many of our young men were flown to Southeast Asia - and flung back to the Barrio in body bags. And we have seen rioting. And there has long been a season of tears and breathlessness here - El Barrio is an epicenter of asthma. And so even now as a virus haunts the entire globe, the poor, yet again, are granted a perverse priority - first for job loss, eviction, hunger, and death. *How sad to me is spring's arrival.*

Yet we also have great reason for hope here on 103rd Street. Our families remain strong and enduring, our teachers, resolute and reassuring, and our students are diligent, while finding many moments of discovery and joy. **When most public and charter schools are shuttered for the summer, we will continue to deliver our elite liberal arts programming - knowing there will be no vacation or breaks for our families.** And



thanks to you, our **East Harlem School Emergency Relief Fund** grows by the day, so we can continue bringing *the best education to those with the least*.

And new relationships and possibilities emerge in the wake of loss: **a virtual tutoring program**, that should become a model, has been started with **Chapin** students by a supporter who had already given us new life and hope at the start of the pandemic. Another powerful friend of the school has ensured that every student has a laptop, allowing academic connection and continuity of care between our staff and our families - this same person of vision is also helping us build **a virtual speaker series**, connecting our students with thought leaders - another program that could and should have societal resonance.

We are at an axial point, I think, for our nation. In the midst of pandemic, no other country is also burning. But thanks to you, dear friend, in our shaded corner of Spanish Harlem, a beautiful spring is blooming. Let others know what serenity and joy is possible for us together!

May you look after yourself with ease.

Love,
Ivan