



**FOUR QUALITIES OF TODAY'S  
PEOPLE.**

**REFLECTIONS OF A LINGUIST IN THE  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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## NATURAL SEMANTIC METALANGUAGE

On Monday, April 6, 2020, the scientific community of the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) held its first online workshop. This community is composed of linguists from around the world working with Anna Wierzbicka (University of Canberra, Australia) and Cliff Goddard (Griffith University, Australia).



Anna Wierzbicka, Bert Peeters, Felix Ameka  
Jean Hawkins, Cliff Goddard, Zhengdao Ye  
Jock Wong, Anna Gladkova, Carol Frostey

In this model we work with very basic words of universal meaning, called primitives. In the workshop the meaning of some words about the coronavirus, such as *virus* or *disease*, was analyzed.

At the end of the workshop we received a letter from Dr. Maria Giulia Marini, a doctor from Milan expert in Narrative Medicine. She sent us an S.O.S. asking us for help. Due to our research in semantics, she believes we would be able of writing something to young people, adults and those who have lost hope, and help them understand the importance of our contribution in the difficult task of overcoming this battle against the virus. The pages that follow are an attempt to respond to her cry for help.

The metalanguage of the NSM is universal, therefore rendering it suitable for a problem that is also universal, that of the coronavirus, for which universal solutions have been proposed so far.

We will describe four characteristics that many people are exhibiting these days: they are responsible, free, dedicated and hopeful.

We will accomplish it in accordance with the following scheme:

**QUALITY:** we attempt to define it with semantic primitives (words of universal meaning). (I apologize as I don't achieve the usual good result of NSM researchers.)

**SCENARIO:** describes a possible scenario that could pertain people who have this quality.

**THOUGHTS:** we address these people directly with our reflections.

**SLOGAN:** we synthesize everything in a slogan, generally written in the second person.



A watercolor painting of a young child's face, looking directly at the viewer. The child has large, expressive green eyes and a slightly open mouth. The background is filled with vibrant, swirling colors in shades of red, orange, yellow, and purple, creating a sense of movement and energy. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and blended colors.

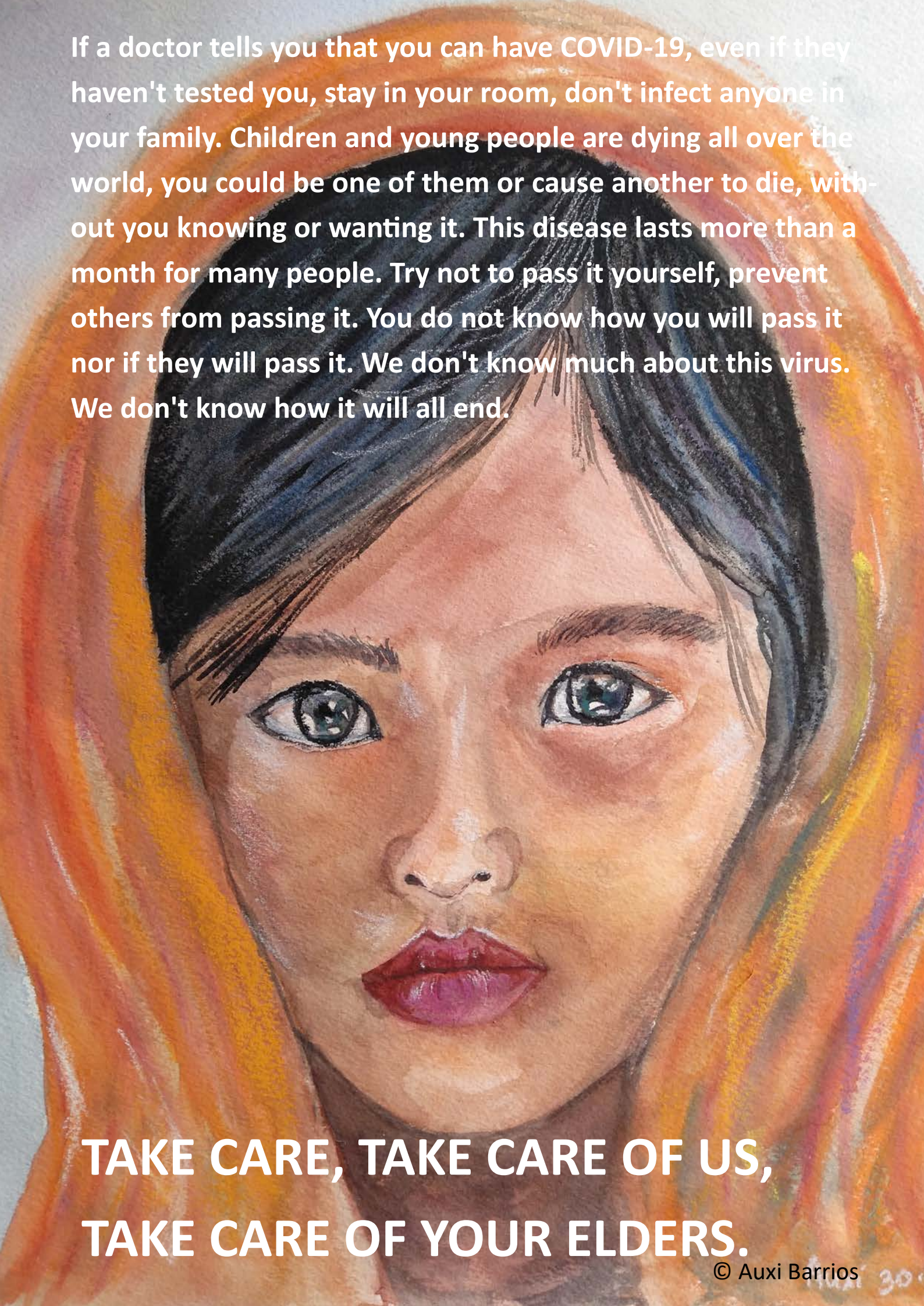
## RESPONSIBLE

A responsible person knows that if he does some things, good things can happen and if he doesn't do them, bad things can happen. A responsible person wants good things to happen, so he does all the good things he can do.

You are young and you don't know that someone has put a machine gun in your hands. If you carry the coronavirus inside (and you can carry it without you noticing), the machine gun fires on its own. That machine gun is yourself. Its cannon is your mouth. If you talk, if you sing, if you cough, if you laugh, you fire a flurry of virus without knowing it.

**Those viruses can kill others or turn them into children of war, machine gun in hand. Those viruses can stay in the air and kill other people.**





If a doctor tells you that you can have COVID-19, even if they haven't tested you, stay in your room, don't infect anyone in your family. Children and young people are dying all over the world, you could be one of them or cause another to die, without you knowing or wanting it. This disease lasts more than a month for many people. Try not to pass it yourself, prevent others from passing it. You do not know how you will pass it nor if they will pass it. We don't know much about this virus. We don't know how it will all end.

**TAKE CARE, TAKE CARE OF US,  
TAKE CARE OF YOUR ELDERS.**



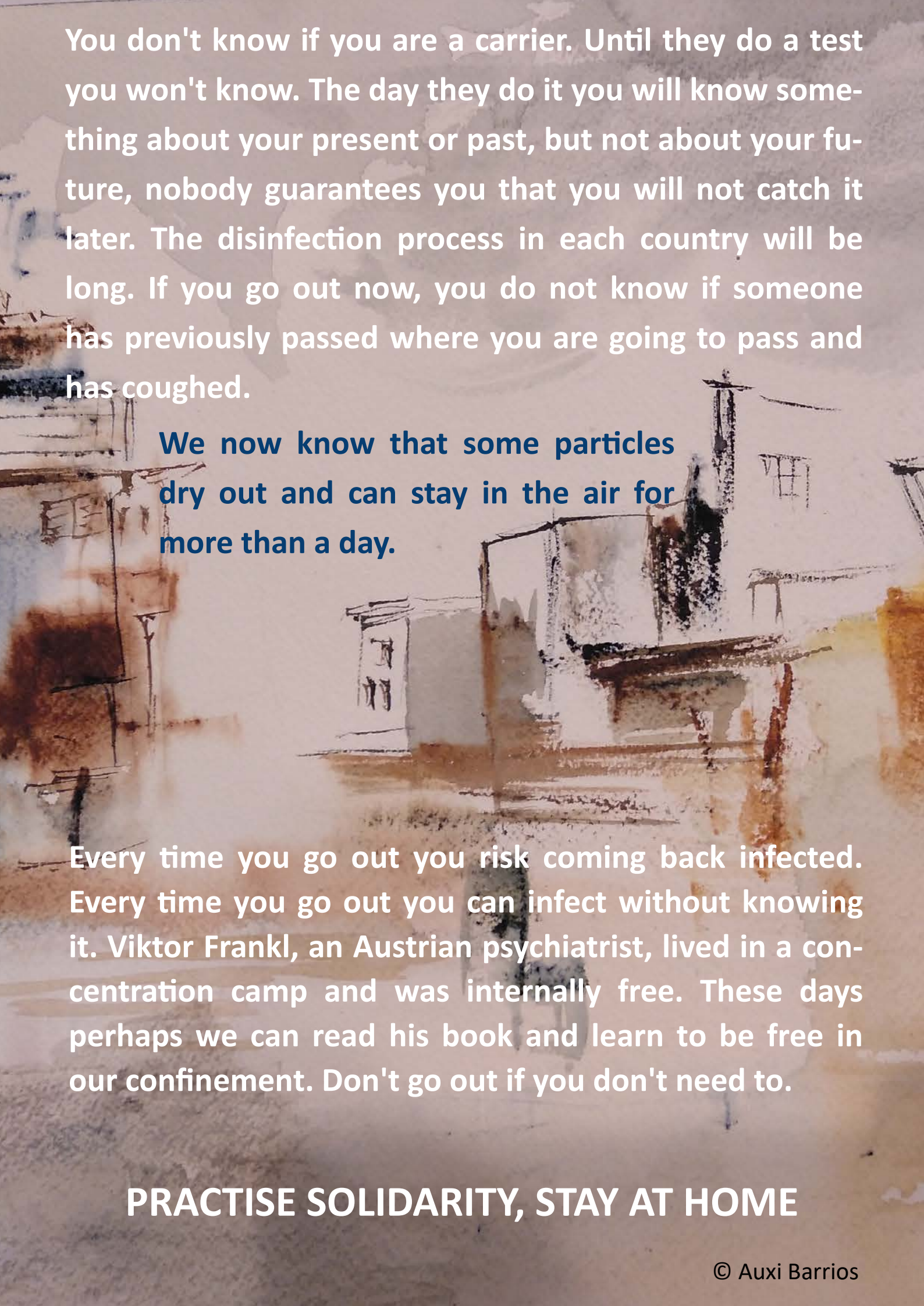


**FREE**

**A free person can do what he wants as long as it is not bad to anyone**

**A person can do what he wants to do and not be free. A person can do what he does not want to do and be free. A very free person wants to do good things for himself and others, and he does them. We can always do good things for ourselves and for others. We can always be free.**



A watercolor illustration of a city street scene. The background is a mix of light and dark brown washes, suggesting a hazy or dusty atmosphere. In the foreground, there are several utility poles with cross-arms, and a few buildings with simple window outlines. The style is loose and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

You don't know if you are a carrier. Until they do a test you won't know. The day they do it you will know something about your present or past, but not about your future, nobody guarantees you that you will not catch it later. The disinfection process in each country will be long. If you go out now, you do not know if someone has previously passed where you are going to pass and has coughed.

**We now know that some particles dry out and can stay in the air for more than a day.**

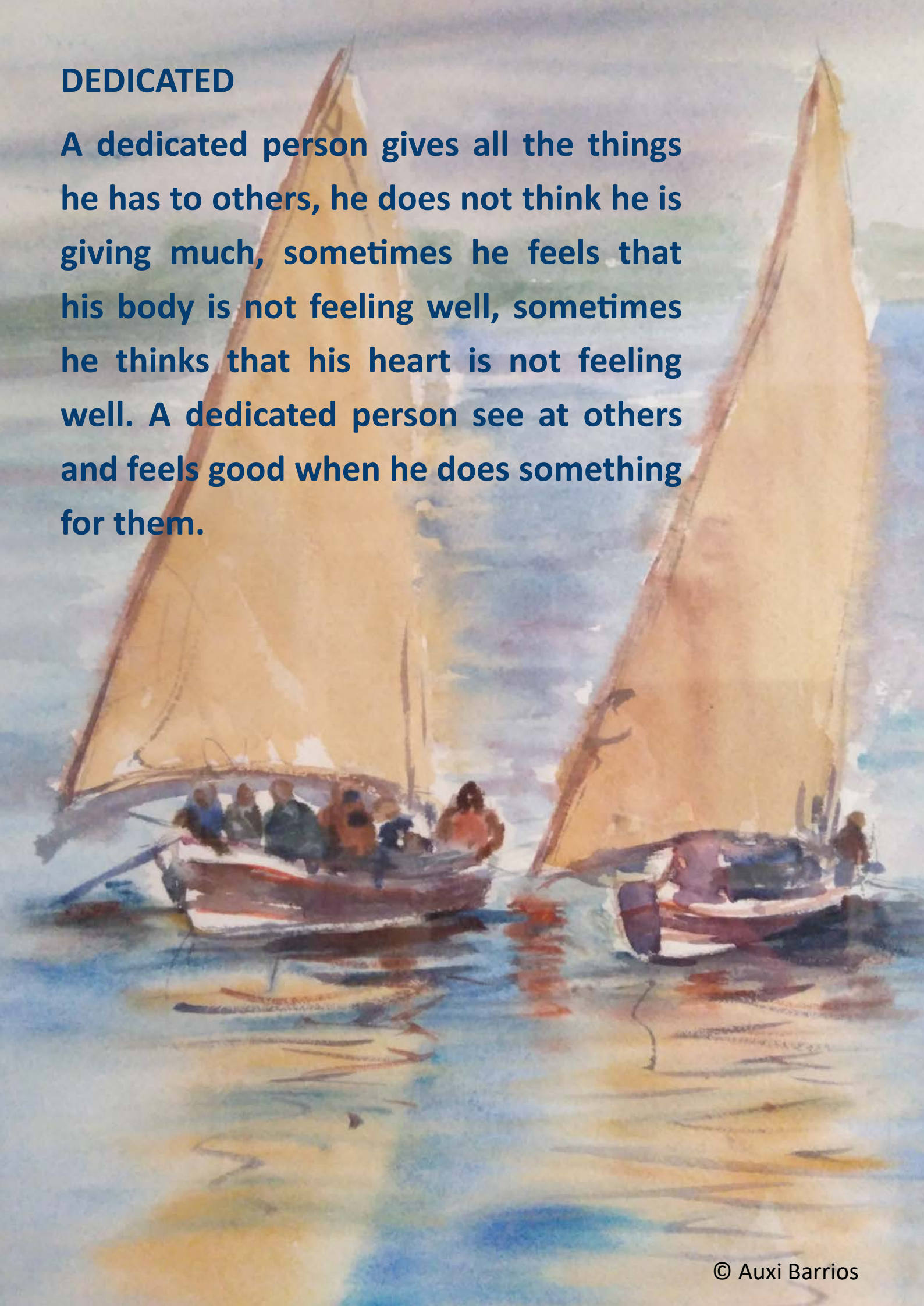
Every time you go out you risk coming back infected. Every time you go out you can infect without knowing it. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, lived in a concentration camp and was internally free. These days perhaps we can read his book and learn to be free in our confinement. Don't go out if you don't need to.

**PRACTISE SOLIDARITY, STAY AT HOME**

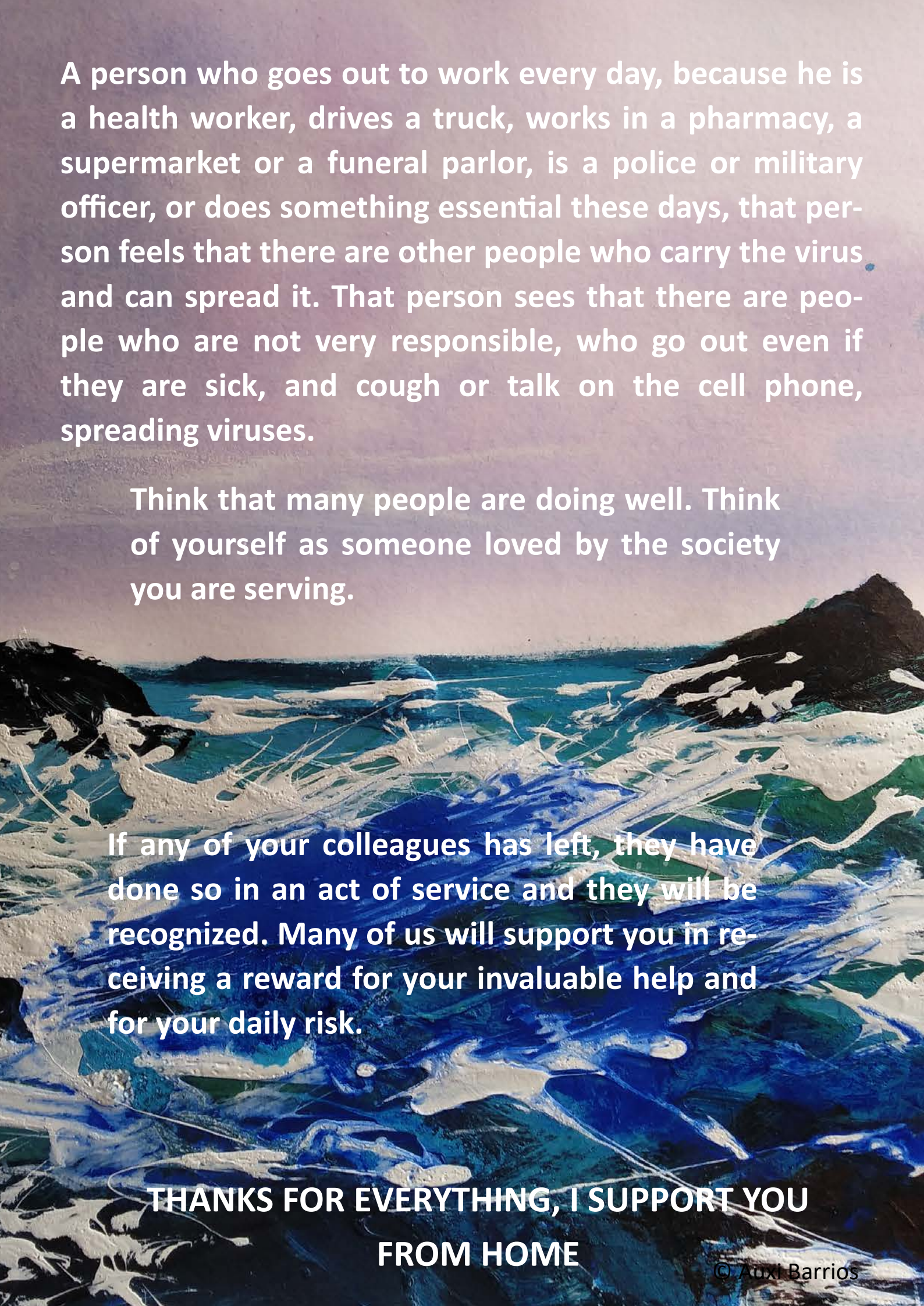


## **DEDICATED**

**A dedicated person gives all the things he has to others, he does not think he is giving much, sometimes he feels that his body is not feeling well, sometimes he thinks that his heart is not feeling well. A dedicated person see at others and feels good when he does something for them.**







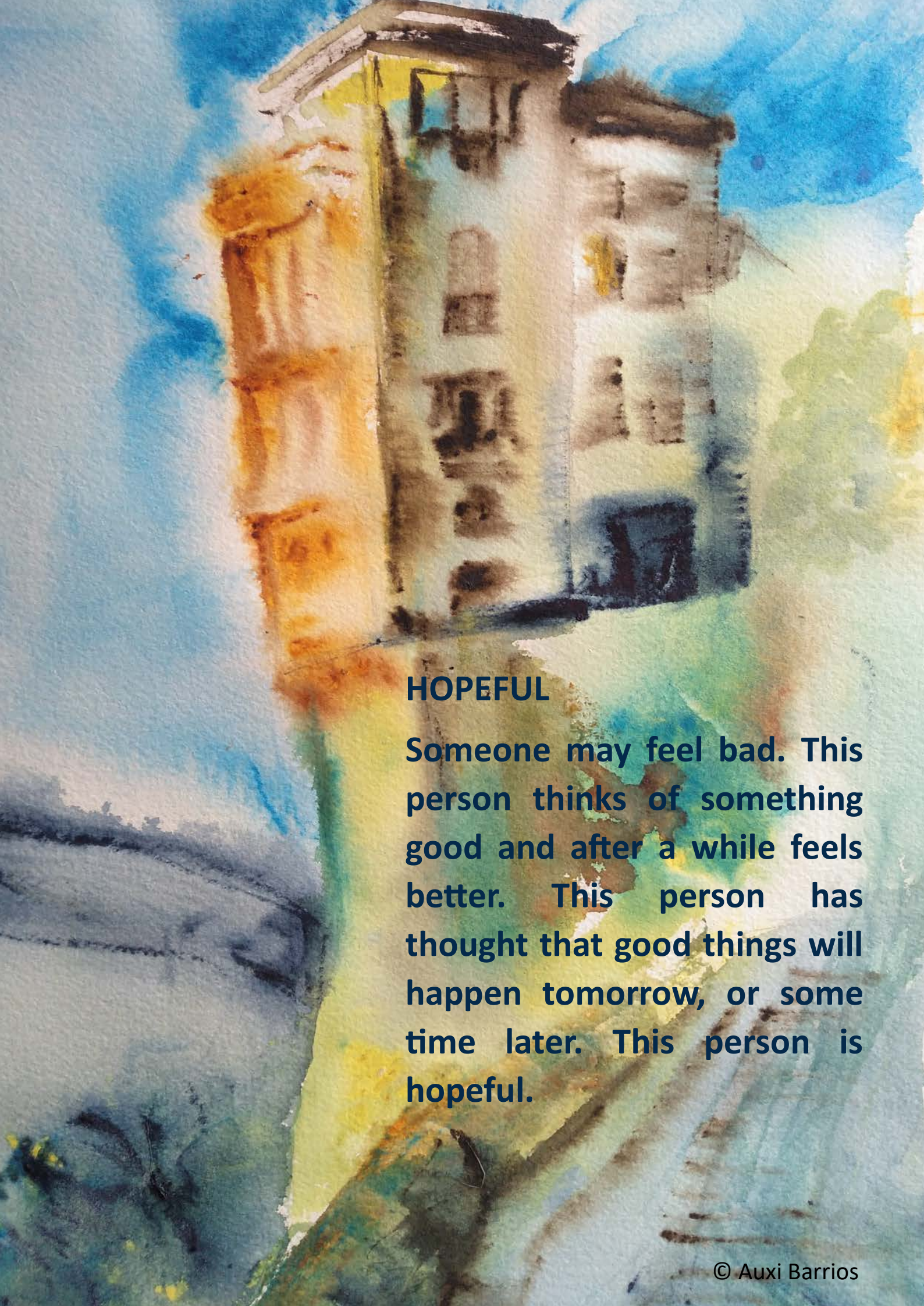
A person who goes out to work every day, because he is a health worker, drives a truck, works in a pharmacy, a supermarket or a funeral parlor, is a police or military officer, or does something essential these days, that person feels that there are other people who carry the virus and can spread it. That person sees that there are people who are not very responsible, who go out even if they are sick, and cough or talk on the cell phone, spreading viruses.

Think that many people are doing well. Think of yourself as someone loved by the society you are serving.

If any of your colleagues has left, they have done so in an act of service and they will be recognized. Many of us will support you in receiving a reward for your invaluable help and for your daily risk.

**THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, I SUPPORT YOU  
FROM HOME**

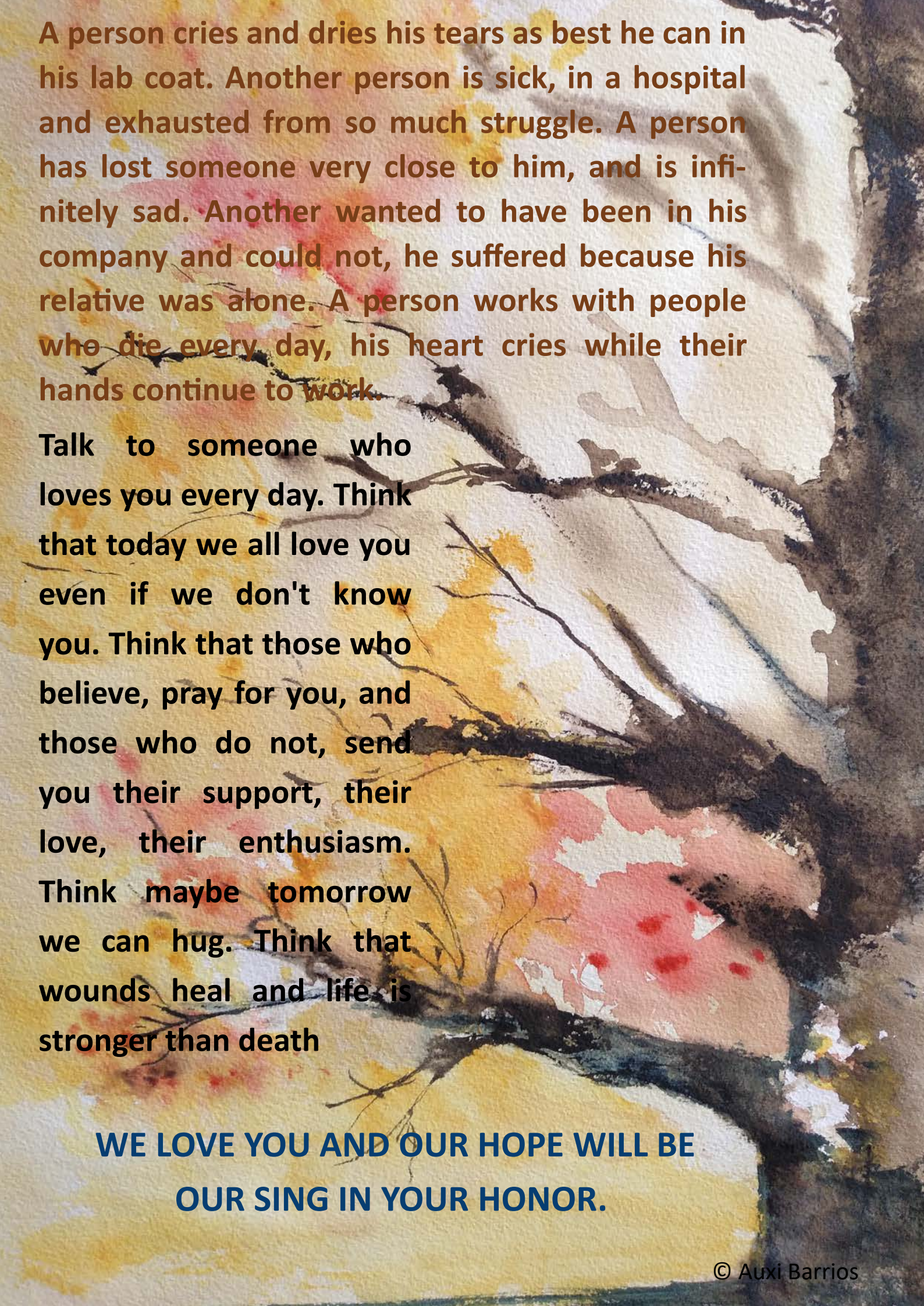




## **HOPEFUL**

**Someone may feel bad. This person thinks of something good and after a while feels better. This person has thought that good things will happen tomorrow, or some time later. This person is hopeful.**





A person cries and dries his tears as best he can in his lab coat. Another person is sick, in a hospital and exhausted from so much struggle. A person has lost someone very close to him, and is infinitely sad. Another wanted to have been in his company and could not, he suffered because his relative was alone. A person works with people who die every day, his heart cries while their hands continue to work.

Talk to someone who loves you every day. Think that today we all love you even if we don't know you. Think that those who believe, pray for you, and those who do not, send you their support, their love, their enthusiasm. Think maybe tomorrow we can hug. Think that wounds heal and life is stronger than death

**WE LOVE YOU AND OUR HOPE WILL BE  
OUR SING IN YOUR HONOR.**



*In memory of all the loved ones who offered their lives for us and left us at this time, without us being able to accompany them.*

Dedicated to the Italian epidemiologist Maria Giulia Marini and all the teams around the world, who work day after day, sharing the desire that this situation ends soon.

**Texts and watercolors:**

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