

You Are Welcome Here—

To hold and grieve, praise and love endless,
unstoppable. Pray and light candles for those

lost. Each shining, sun-filled September morning
there is an ache that permeates the day. Loss

calling out the names over and again. Each year,
we memorialize and enshrine remember the resilience,

recollect the grit of first responders, firefighters, EMT's
who fought for their lives and all the others around them.

Who did not give or let up. Back down or look away.
Responding to trauma, the people held us, wept with us,

lit candles for all night vigils. Shared photographs
of missing family members. Offered food, beds, shoulders,

places for collective storytelling. Practicing the art of peace,
recollection. How to never forget. Hold onto the people

who came before us. Carry the lives lost through each day.
The way we remember is the way that we live. So we live.

To hold onto and honor New York City for its recovery.
Its snapback, rebound. Its steady, glowing, buoyant rebellion.

This is a place of 24-hour love. Deep hugs and long talks
that fill every city park from lower Manhattan to the Heights.

Liberty Park to Fort Tryon – a place to rest and stay. Remember.
A place to connect, come together, show up for each other.

Place of protests where no one gets hurt and everyone is heard
of restructuring systems, rebuilding with imagination and heart.

Our city is alive as ever and always. With hibiscus and yarrow
still blooming in the Heather Gardens. Always – rebirth.

Soon saffron and windflower. This is the way we restore.
Reinvigorate. How we rest up and stay ready. Stay vibrant.

This is a place of children hollering from the top of swing sets.
BBQ's at J Hood Park and birthday parties at Bennett.

Blessings, balloons, prayers and cheek kisses. Fist bumps

and all the dance moves on all the dance floors. Abrazos y besos.

Celebration. Place of wounds healing, refuge and catch your breath.
Holding on even when it feels too hard, like it's too much.

We got you here. We hold onto you here. We love you here.
You show up and we feed you, give you directions

maybe with a few curse words thrown in, but hell
we love you here. We want you to get where you are going.

This is a place of gather you when you are down of feed you
when you are hungry, put a cool washcloth to your head

when you are sick. Bandage wounds, tell stories
until you fall asleep. Remind you what resilience looks like.

A clanging of pots and hollers and yelps for nurses and doctors.
Artists, therapists, teachers, custodians, activists, botanists.

Healers, guides. Archivists. Photographers. Your stories,
your one million words for love, all the languages, all the ways you pray.

Your traditions and ancestors who walked before. Those who will not
ever let us forget. Today we say stay a spell, unwind your spirit

bring your cousins and aunties, your tios and abuelas too. This is a time
for returning, for staying longer and later than you thought you would.

For showing up. Being all of you just the way you are.
You are all welcome here. Yes, you sitting in the front row & oh!

You in the back, legs crossed, child in your lap. Singing and dancing,
laughing with their voices turned all the way up. You are welcome here too.

In this city we love, in this city that loves us back. Complicated, gentle,
tender, endless. Always, you are welcome – right here.

Ellen Hagan