

# Remembering on Mother's Day . . .

The Bethlehem Gadfly Uncategorized May 9, 2021

Long-time colleague Ted Morgan just now read Billy Collins' poem "The Lanyard" at Quaker meeting this morning. I wish you could have heard his voice. Quiet, reflective. I had to turn my eyes from the Zoom screen, as if afraid someone would see the tears slowly welling there. Silly masculinity. After Ted's reading, I was surprised by the reaction of the audience here to the author's reading — laughter. Maybe because it was a large group. I don't know. But it felt quite different to me, alone, in Sunday worship. I wish you could have heard Ted's voice. But I'm sure you will be moved by this simple, beautiful tribute to a mother.

<https://youtu.be/oEjB7rB3sWc>

## The Lanyard

By [Billy Collins](#)

The other day I was ricocheting slowly  
off the blue walls of this room,  
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,  
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,  
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary  
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist  
could send one into the past more suddenly—  
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp  
by a deep Adirondack lake  
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips  
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard  
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,  
but that did not keep me from crossing  
strand over strand again and again  
until I had made a boxy  
red and white lanyard for my mother.  
She gave me life and milk from her breasts,  
and I gave her a lanyard.  
She nursed me in many a sick room,  
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,  
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,  
and then led me out into the airy light  
and taught me to walk and swim,  
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.  
Here are thousands of meals, she said,  
and here is clothing and a good education.  
And here is your lanyard, I replied,  
which I made with a little help from a counselor.  
Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,  
strong legs, bones and teeth,  
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,  
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.

And here, I wish to say to her now,  
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth  
that you can never repay your mother,  
but the rueful admission that when she took  
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,  
I was as sure as a boy could be  
that this useless, worthless thing I wove  
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.