

254 Daffodil

Daffodil is cold in the predawn hours, as she harvests broccoli in the Salinas Valley. Unmasked and working in close quarters with other undocumented laborers, she faces the dual risks of contracting the new COVID-19 virus and of deportation. Her employers provide neither sick days nor safeguards against this disease.

She is pugnacious, determined, and resilient, working a job very few “legal” Americans will accept. Daffodil carries her curved harvesting knives in strong, skilled hands.

As death and hospitalization numbers soared during COVID’s first wave, I broadened my understanding of the term “essential workers,” which had expanded beyond food producers and medical teams to include meat packers, grocery store clerks, truck drivers, and other economically and medically vulnerable workers.

Now, more than two years later, the pandemic is moving into endemic status. I am exhausted by uncertainty, caution, isolation, and surges, and I am frustrated and angry that Daffodil and other workers continue to risk exposure, illness, and even death while striving to earn a living and serve our country. Unsafe behavior and political strife continue to grow without bounds, egged on by fearmongering and disinformation.