

## GO WEST

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**This poem was written to commemorate the Taos Writing and Wellness Retreat for health professionals hosted by the University of New Mexico School of Medicine in August 2025.**

**G**ather a womb of women  
a phalanx of physicians  
a mission of mothers.

When one sneezes

they all will say Salud in a chorus.

When one cries

one will hold out a hand,

the one beside her will embrace her shoulders

and another will offer a box of tissues.

When one makes a devastatingly droll quip about toxic masculinity in medicine,

they will all practice a kegel and howl in delight.

Early morning musing meditations while running rhythmically down dry dusty and solitary sidewalks

followed by brief blithe banter

with the base camp babysitter or second string spouse

not seeking permission to persist

but wiping the mental white board filled with curious questions

and guarded guilt for their elective absence,

clean.

Then rejoin the coven, carefree  
refreshed and refocused  
with a meeded mug of coffee and cream,  
and recommit to unraveling demons, doubts and dreams.

The fall of democracy is stressing us out.  
As if "Back to School" isn't enough for this time of year,  
the pleasant and painful paths we are pursuing  
whether trodden or untrodden soil  
are exhausting.

We co-miserate and co-celebrate in alternating patterns.

Have you ever seen a bevy of bodies come together in a circle,  
a circumference tightly made  
shoulder to shoulder  
and suddenly synchronized  
sit  
supporting each other?

This is what we strive for.  
Each gives and receives.  
Novices find their nuanced niche of self knowledge to share.  
Even designated teachers learn.

With outstretched arms we wave goodbye, each holding threads of the tapestry  
woven from our words.

Go west young woman,  
the old you will not return,  
Or rather  
you will return renewed. ■

## **Biographical Note**

Rachel Gagen grew up in Richmond VA, and earned a BA in literature at Yale. She attended medical school at the University of Virginia and completed her pediatric residency at the Medical College of Georgia. She has lived with her family in Virginia as a full-time pediatrician since 2007. She is a writer of 3 books, hundreds of unpublished poems and now one published! She will complete her certificate in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University in 2026. She is one of those people who loves coconut, the Oxford comma, and long walks in the woods with her dogs.