

School of Social Work  
308 North Hall  
Iowa City, IA 52242  
<http://clas.uiowa.edu/socialwork/>

# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA School of Social Work

## National Poetry Contest for Social Workers



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The judges for the 2015 contest were:

-Ellen Szabo, M.Ed., founder and director of *Write Now*, [www.writenow.bz](http://www.writenow.bz), a veteran writer, writing coach, instructor, and facilitator of creative writing workshops including the annual *Creative Writing Seminar for Helping Professionals* in Iowa City;

-Justin Jannise, a graduate of Yale University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop is the Provost's Visiting Writer-in-Residence for Poetry and a creative writing instructor at the University of Iowa. Justin is an experienced teacher, tutor, editor and journalist;

-Tiffany Flowers MA, LMHC, IADC is a Chicago inner city native. She received her BA from Wartburg College and Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling with a specialty in mental health from the University of Iowa. She is the founder of Future Focus Life : Forward Living with a Sparkle, empowering others through spoken word, coaching, and other creative outlets in obtainment of their life goals. She also is the founding therapist of Pathway Counseling Center;

-Jennifer Adrian Leeney, currently attends the Iowa Writer's Workshop for Fiction and is slated to graduate in 2016. Jennifer received her BASW and MSW degrees from Iowa, and plans to continue her clinical work when her MFA concludes.

## About the National Poetry Contest for Social Workers

Iowa City is the home of the world-renowned Iowa Writer's Workshop, the International Writing Program, the annual Iowa Summer Writing Festival, The Patient Voice Project, the Iowa City Book Festival and the Iowa Youth Writing Project. On November 20, 2009, UNESCO designated Iowa City, Iowa, the world's third City of Literature, making the community part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Our annual *Creative Writing Seminar for Helping Professionals* began in the early ninety's when then director Tom Walz hired a Writers Workshop graduate to teach creative writing to social workers. Today, the seminar teaches both writing skills and applications of writing for healing and social change.

The National Poetry Contest for Social Workers was started in 2013 by Development Coordinator Jefri Palermo, and faculty member Mercedes Bern-Klug with support from Ed Saunders, Director of the School of Social Work.

Questions about the contest or creative writing at the School of Social Work can be made by calling 319-335-3750 or by email at [jefri-palermo@uiowa.edu](mailto:jefri-palermo@uiowa.edu).

For those interested in participating in the 2015-16 Poetry Contest, online submissions can be made at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/socialwork>

If you would like to make a donation to the School to provide scholarships for Creative Writing Seminar students or to support the poetry contest, you can do so online at

<http://www.givetoioowa.org/socialwork>

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*Jeanne Higgs, University of Houston*

**Street session**

Once I walked with a man who told me  
no one had ever considered  
he might like to walk away the  
pain as he talked,  
tears in his eyes  
his heart in my hands.  
Is there any greater gift  
than a shared sorrow,  
than a trust you didn't think you had?  
Together we considered the vast space  
between what we do  
and who we are,  
and knew it for what it was  
that hidden connection  
our common humanity.

**About The University of Iowa and the  
School of Social Work**

*Griselda Williams, University of Missouri, Columbia*

**To Be A Social Worker**

When you come to be a social worker, come with your respect for the child who is different than the rest; see in that child her special gifts.

Come with your compassion for the child who did not sleep last night because in his home was yet another fight.

Come with your empathy for the child who was put to bed with hits and kicks instead of hugs and kisses.

Do not judge the child who appears angry and unattached for that is what happens when she is removed from her home in the middle of the night.

Understand that when he does not get along well with others, it isn't because he does not want to; he has not had someone like you to show him the way.

Know that though his father, and his father, and his father before him are imprisoned there is always hope with the child who stands before you.

When you come to be a social worker, bring your code of ethics but be sure they include your flexible way, your accepting nature, and your understanding spirit.

The University of Iowa is a major national research university located on a 1,900-acre campus in Iowa City in southeast Iowa, on the Iowa River near the intersection of U.S. Interstate Highways 80 and 380.

Iowa is composed of 11 colleges, the largest of which is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, enrolling most of Iowa's undergraduates. More than 30,500 students enroll at Iowa each year. The University both provides and attracts a wide variety of cultural opportunities, Big Ten athletic events, and a number of business endeavors resulting from scientific and educational research that originated at Iowa. All year major poets, writers, artists, historians, scientists, and others speak or perform in University venues or read at local bookstores. Excellent public schools, close, safe, and comfortable neighborhoods, and a highly educated population mean that Iowa City frequently appears high on "best-place-to-live" listings in national magazines.

Established in 1847, Iowa has won international recognition for its wealth of achievements in the arts, sciences, and humanities. Iowa was the first U.S. public university to admit men and women on an equal basis and the first institution of higher education in the nation to accept creative work in theater, writing, music, and art as theses for advanced degrees. It established the first law school and the first educational radio station west of the Mississippi, broadcast the world's first educational television programs, and developed and continues to hold preeminence in educational testing.

The University of Iowa **School of Social Work** in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is the oldest and largest school of social work in Iowa. The school is noted for providing programs that serve the entire state through distance education, part-time programs to facilitate the education of employed social workers, the professionalization of undergraduate social work education, and the origination of in-home family preservation services.

Our MSW program has been continuously accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1951. The undergraduate major in social work became available in 1962, was recognized in 1970 when CSWE began regulating undergraduate social work curriculum and received full accreditation in 1974. The UI PhD program is the only social work doctoral program in the state of Iowa. It admitted the first cohort of students in 1998 and graduated its first PhD in 2004. Fifty-two percent of our 6,000+ alumni live and work in Iowa.

After 21 years of hosting the Creative Writing Seminar for Helping Professionals, in 2012 the School expanded its efforts to reach social workers and showcase their creativity through a national poetry competition. For more information about creative writing at Iowa, please go to page 118.

*Michael C. Wright, Barry University*

### **My Key Desire**

Have you seen the children who cry from abuse, whose innocence  
has all but been broken?  
Observed the face of the returning soldier whose anguish remains  
unspoken?  
Did you notice the feelings that stirred in you as you visited the  
prison that day?  
Listening to rapists and abusers of children, did your resolve begin  
to sway?  
You love social work, that is why you came, believing you might  
make a difference.  
But now you've seen things so shocking to you, that it's hard to de-  
scribe them in sentence.  
I thought my key desire was that of mending some broken hearts  
in time;  
Nor did I think that my bias would sit as a judge because of a  
crime.  
Yet now I must needs dig deep to assure this path that I have  
chosen;  
Does not cool my desire to help others out until it becomes too  
frozen.  
I'm heartened by seeing the children who hurt, retain within them  
resilience.  
Likewise the elders who despite life's unfairness, share stories of  
wisdom and brilliance.  
So I think no matter the field of endeavor, our goals must always  
be higher;  
To "walk in their shoes", if just for a moment, embodies my key  
desire.

*Jessica Nobile, University of Georgia*

**Social Work Manifesto:**

An adaption of Marinetti's (1909) Manifesto of Futurism

1. We want to sing, dance, and perform our love of justice, self-determination, solidarity, empowerment, and resilience.
2. The essential element of our social work is service inflamed by love of all humankind, courage, compassion, & liberty.
3. Now is the time to activate social equality. We want to exalt movements of compassion, impervious unity, peaceful protest, the perilous leap into change, the strike of lightning, a profound awakening into a new and better reality.
4. We declare that the glory of society has been enriched by diversity and tarnished by divides. We move to attack stagnation caused by oppression and ignite progress through solidarity, equality, and social justice.
5. We want to hurl humankind into harmony with the hemisphere of plant earth.
6. Those with and without privilege must love each other as one impermeable movement.
7. The struggle is beautiful. It illuminates the star-speckled power of courage and strength. From the threads of struggle we will weave a universal blanket of comfort to suffocate oppression and the pain it inflicts.
8. We are winged with infiniteness. Everlasting and free when unified as one human race.
9. We want to glorify community, the only cure for the world; destruction of ego, power, bigotry, segregation, & greed.
10. We sing, dance, & perform unity, a feverish desire to exist in synchronization, dignity and worth of all; multi-colored, multi-faceted elements of human nature. Adventurously we social workers embark on a new and better future.

## 1st Place Winner

*Marjorie Thomsen, The Catholic University of America*

**With Mrs. Nguyen at the Senior Center**

She'll bring you rice paper wrapped around soft pork and noodle. Her land and water intact inside the tight, foolproof rolls. For years you'll chew her mayhem, fresh-picked mint leaf tucked in your empathy, fragrant in the space between you. She'll describe the dark palette of war, various tints of loving a husband, children in a new country. One day she'll wear a silk tunic and you'll guess someone once called her hazel eyes *Aura, Tree Wind, Waterborne*. The language impasse with the local butcher is charcoal with no moonlight to guide the way when describing how to cut meat off the bone. One day she'll look out the window and see how colors change when the world tilts. She'll tell you to always knock with your elbows when visiting another's home—knuckles unavailable, your hands so laden with gifts. You'll both begin to carry an umbrella from the family of mango when there's a chance of rain.

## 2nd Place Winner

*Nahomi Martinez, University of Texas at El Paso*

### **Friendly Fire**

She wore the uniform but she might as well have worn camo  
between her legs.

She smiled and told me that maybe that would've hidden her  
better.

Her smile transitioned to a state of flat affect, depressed mood with  
tearfulness.

Or so I was supposed to document.

Nobody was willing to say what happened but it was echoing loudly  
in my head.

She was a soldier and she was losing the war.

Someone had stripped her from her gear, rank and her body.

She was a soldier yet the cameo after her service was wilting from  
her face and heart.

She was a one-woman army and her perpetrator had hit her with  
friendly fire.

She couldn't bring herself to say it aloud but her records said  
MST.

The four walls were enclosing around her, leaving her naked to the  
world.

Her shame hung over her head where once her beret was neatly  
placed and worn proudly.

I was supposed to give her a diagnosis when I knew what she  
needed was justice.

Friendly fire had hit her and she was being blamed for bleeding.

She was a wounded warrior but nobody called her hero.

*Rachel Ann McCroy, New York University*

### *excerpt from "Circles"*

I know the world deserves better

The circles end here

The poverty of our lives

When we were born and unwanted

When we lived and were taken too soon

Others may have loved you because you are beautiful

They may loved you because you are smart

But I have loved you because you are kind

You have always known in your heart what is true

It will be harder to pursue wisdom and virtue

Don't let them take the good away in you

## 3rd Place Winner

*Mia Tyree Thornton, New York University*

### Owed To Black Mothers

Don't insult my intelligence with alternative narratives and insidious lies

If your actions were inwrought with negligence it's imperative you look me in the eyes

Don't speak of your suspicion, his might or his scorn

Tell me of the imprudent bullets that left his body torn

I am consumed with nagging questions so draft your story well

His humanity you try to lessen but I damn you all to hell

I ask not for your pity or promise of new policy

I join the ranks of brown women who cry the same as me

You gather our sons in masses by bullet and by book

But I challenge all the classes brave enough to look

Our pain you ignore and our pleas you reject

Reminds me of the Judge who told Dred Scott to recollect

"Black men have no right, a white man ought respect"

Your actions I despise but if you intend to tell me lies

The least you could do is look me in the eyes

*Joel Izlar, University of Georgia*

### Social Welfare Politics in Four Haikus:

Soup

Ladles clang on pots,  
"Pay attention, sir, your turn for soup."  
It's all your fault.

Shelter

The laughter of children,  
Comforts hearts of mothers.  
A shelter safe from hate.

Bridge

Life under the bridge,  
is better when it's warm out.  
Winter is coming.

Late Shift

The fluorescent lights gleam,  
Onto third-shift shelves.  
Rent is due in the morning.

## 4th Place

*Bridget Rohan Garrity, The University of Iowa*

### Case Note

This writer will note that  
The Identified Patient asked about grief again.  
The I.P. perseverates on this question.  
Affect: bereft, disoriented...where in the DSM, again?  
Writer will note concern about rumination.  
Content: What? And Why? And How? i.e.:  
What is this, around me in glinting bits  
Why is it laid at my feet  
How do I remake a thing when I can't remember what it was?  
What do you have to say, the I.P. asks. Please answer me.  
Writer, of course, won't tell her that she is left in dismay, too.  
We don't have time,  
The hour is almost up,  
She must remember to breathe  
Her inner tide the one true thing.

*Laura Thornton, Humboldt State University*

### Beautiful Souls

If they grab your arm don't keep your paces  
Turn around and look at their faces  
You'll see wrinkles, and knowledge, and beautiful souls  
Wondering what's left after they've carried out their roles  
Eyes twinkle brightly with uncertainty and longing  
Wondering where they can get a sense of belonging  
Why I am here, I don't understand  
When I go upstairs I'm gonna question the man  
Don't shuffle around us, we want your attention  
One kind work means more than can be mentioned  
Try eating your food with a blindfold in place  
They you'll see why the food is still stacked on my plate  
Notice me please, I need help with eating  
My hands are shaky, my eyesight is fleeting  
I may be opinionated and a bit outspoken, but my heart is quite  
fragile and often it's broken

*Renna Wirchin, University of Pennsylvania*

Hands of service  
Hearts of compassion  
Actions through integrity in dignified fashion  
Hands of hope  
Hearts of grace  
Addressing limitations from culture and race  
Hands of comfort  
Hearts of kindness  
Becoming a voice for vulnerable blindness  
Hands that hold other hands  
Hearts that protect other hearts  
Guiding and supporting even our weakest parts  
And through these challenges, adversities, and fights  
We as social workers, advocates, and agents of change  
Are committed to providing a glimmer of light.

*Faith Breisblatt, Boston University*

### **A Kind of Metamorphosis**

From a chair adjacent my own, you talk of progress  
for the first time, the 735 glass panels that  
construct the wall of the Moakley Courthouse  
where you now work—without one, the others  
would surely collapse in black hole fashion—and this, you say  
is interdependence, attempting to live in congruence with others,  
seeking community for belonging's sake. Ten months ago  
your eyes did not meet mine, even in calloused  
gesture. Ten months ago, you did not want this life—  
of people of places of what, to you, manifested as contrived  
connection. And then suddenly, as if the teeth of your life  
hardened into place, in hunger, in bargain  
I don't want to be stagnant. I want something else  
and those eyes, no longer in orbit,  
did not look away.

*Mary Finucane, University of Pennsylvania*

**Travelers: In Session**

In flight, we sit buckled into blue seats, traveling 560 miles per hour. Drinking coffee. Eating peanuts. Reading. As though at this moment, none of us were catapulting through the atmosphere at 560 miles per hour. As though the light reflecting in that blinding way off rivers and shiny roof tops were not miracle enough. We sit and leaf through Sky magazine, reading about baby wipe warmers and ultimate shoe organizers. Keeping cool or too friendly with the one whose arm rests beside ours. We yawn to pop our ears, check watches and reapply lipstick. Preparing for the moment of landing when we will be standing still again.

She says, “I want to be better. I want this to end.” But she is traveling at 560 miles per hour, and subtle change surrounds her. She checks her watch and reapplies lipstick. “I’m ready for all this growing to be done, so I can get on with my life.” She started in Detroit and wants to be in New Orleans. She took a detour through the Badlands, considered fleeing to Mexico.

The plane shakes as it descends. The collective stomach drops. A baby cries, his mother tries to comfort him. “Shhh, there. Almost home. We’re almost home.”

*Mery Diaz, University of Pennsylvania*

**A Recusant Road**

Where do I begin?

This vertiginous state of affairs disables my thoughts, opaques my view, confuses my aim

What I do know, however, is that my sisters are denied their value still

and that, just the same, my brothers’ lives are disdained

What I do see, however, is my mother squandered by esurient frills

and my children’s minds commodified for gains

What I do feel, is a fear of the potency of my own impotence which remains untilled

and hope that the search for justice is never in vain

I suppose that if I played my cards right I could easily abscond, be anodyne, no duty to claim

I can shut out the plight of many, I can be still, I can close my eyes to the pain

But so can others, and in the end, where does that leave us all?

So I choose to repugn what hinders

and I choose a recusant road, and in spite of the tide

With my words, and with my fists, and with my feet, and with my choices, and with the others

I will fight until the end.

*Aisha L. Faulkner, University of Pittsburgh*

### **The Man Within**

Here I am, I stand hindered by the bars separating me  
The bars that are a reflection or rather the mirror of the choices of  
my past  
Yes, I am here, but within I do not know how  
I do not know how I got here. How *I* ended up here  
Deceived by one. Deceived by the one I trusted. The only one....  
Me  
But how? How could I deceive MYSELF? How could I have let  
myself end up here? But  
Here I am  
And now I will, no I must, make a change  
But how?  
If I change, who will trust me, who will call me anything different  
than what they once did? A CRIMINAL!  
My God forgave me. But does anybody else? Does it even matter?  
I don't know, but I don't want to go around judged, unforgiven,  
ashamed.  
I want to live free once again, and I hope one person, just one will  
give me a chance  
Will one person see the man, not this mirror image of the  
past....but the man, the true man within?

*Rainer Goldberg, Florida Atlantic University*

### **When I grow up**

I want to be Just  
I want to leave my footprints on the stand, to lay  
the common ground  
with forward movement, Addams' construction  
of Settlement, but a house is not a Home--  
People are the bricks, the anchors, the deck  
where Opportunity dresses, and Judgment can rest  
I want to be Fair conditions,  
not unearned privilege, or the  
dirty secrets of my forefathers  
I want to be Hope, like the crowning of a newborn  
with the first coat of air.

*Rosa M. Rios, Hunter College, CUNY*

this work

with its layers and layers and layers

on any given day

can feel hopeless

like a box of assorted dark chocolate during

mandatory needed breaks

you never know what you are going to get

pressing on these keys and these cases while connecting to

humanity

mindfulness keeps me from feeling numb and disconnected

this work is you, me, us

copied with life experiences, changes, and challenges

and on any given day, permission to listen and help you

which helps me

and helps we

in harmonious advocacy.

*Ashley Zeleznik, Humboldt State University*

Alive and what is more than one could ever guess,

at peace and at the mercy of the crown.

Whose light shone a paddle,

delivered and freshly pressed,

but it was the motion of the concord that turned that fate around.

It swoon, that being

a lust it went seething,

it divided that oar,

and left it in two.

To cover, to tip, to remove,

and then sift.

A timid recollection of future and past,

I can paste this existence into that,

and make anything I want so true.

*Emma Wolford Hager, The University of Iowa*

**Haven**

Rainbow on the door  
Cross in the window  
Church bells over campus  
Nervous feet on the carpet  
Multicolored Converse  
Chairs squeak in the silence  
Pizza and Skittles  
Hands reach out  
Eyes meet around the circle  
Sudden laughter, all at once  
Sharing names, connections  
"Guess I'm not the only one"  
"Can't believe I almost didn't come"

*Dorothy M. Lifka, The University of Iowa*

**Guide to a Successful Life**

Begin  
with one task and  
finish it. Start one more  
and continue until done.  
Repeat.

*Cherra Mathis, University of Pennsylvania*

Of all four fingers and her thumb  
two are missing, stumps still bandaged.  
I'm not sure why, and I feel dumb  
Asking - perhaps it's something she would rather forget,  
Until, glancing down, she sees the covered wounds.  
But on her other remaining digits  
Shines deliberately applied and well-manicured  
Red nail polish. She may lose the fingers but  
She will NOT rescind her hand.

*Joseanna Moseby, Gallaudet University*

**We Carry**

We carry your pain and sorrow  
We carry your joy and growth  
We listen with our hearts  
We give with our minds  
We understand with our sight  
We carry a safe place  
We carry...so you can fly

*Travis W. Cronin, Arizona State University*

### **Zombie Social Work Pragmatism**

Who will the social worker serve in the zombie apocalypse?  
Will she convince the rich to provide just enough to stem the tide  
of new zombies?  
Will she convince the poor not to revolt as a strategy to avoid the  
utter destruction of humanity?  
Will she lead the revolt against the rich because inequality has  
destroyed humanity?  
Will she unite the rich and the poor in a quest for shared survival?  
Will she extend an olive branch to the zombies?  
Will she save the world?  
Zombies take heed!  
She does  
!

*Ritika Chand-Bergfeld, University of Missouri, St. Louis*

Social workers ever strive  
to make ours a better land.  
We aim for what is just  
and endeavor to understand.  
Social workers give voice to the voiceless and appreciate their need.  
We bring change where it's needed  
and are often called to lead.  
Our tasks, sometimes daunting, can be big or small.  
There is much that social workers do.  
We research, lobby, counsel  
teach and case manage too.  
Steadfast that with each positive step  
the future is brighter  
for me, and for you.

*Karineh Mahdessian, University of South Carolina*

### **warriors embodied**

we come from fathers' calloused sorrows &  
great-grandmothers' razor-blade sharp stories of survival  
compassion courses through our veins, forms our words, wraps  
around our wet tongues

we see light in the darkest of places where memory too afraid to  
reside

we believe in possibility where chaos haunts dreams

we know justice dances inside our mouths

we hold space with arms, sweat, lungs, feet, eyes

we inhale hurt & exhale prayer

we matches, igniting

everyday revolutions

we stand, we rise, we fall, we break

we indigo bruise & yellow hope

we no longer afraid

we ready

*Andrew Reynolds, Asbury University*

### **The Least**

Helping those that society finds unnerving, we plead out loud,  
"They too are deserving,  
of an opinion, our ears, yes, even our sympathy, why do we take so  
long to care for the least of these?"

What can I accomplish with so much working against me? Could it  
be that I'm seen so insignificantly?

Who will stand up? Who even has a voice? Not me, not I, the one  
who has never, ever, had that choice.

Only to give up, I'd throw in the towel if I had one. What other  
options do I have? Absolutely none.

People making judgments asking, "who is deserving?" That's the  
wrong question; rather, whom am I serving?

But who is this? That is so patient and so caring. Who would have  
thought that love could be so honest, so daring?

I've never been respected. It's been forever since I've seen it. That's  
never what I expected, how do I know that they mean it?

Helping those that society finds unnerving, we scream out loud,  
"They too are deserving,  
of an opinion, our ears, yes, even our sympathy, why do we take so  
long to care for

you, us,

the least of these?"

*Pamela A. Correll, The University of Iowa*

**The Therapist's Goodbye**

Broken hearts and broken lives  
Tears of shame and lost goodbyes  
Are they yours or are they mine?  
Woven together over time  
The mosaic blends and breaks and shines  
You gave me more than I gave you  
Your stories sacred birds that flew  
Together we gave them wings -- when not  
I pray we both learned something new.  
When it began, I was broken too  
You healed me as much as I healed you

*Kathryn D. Arnett, University of Pennsylvania*

Of all the days  
You picked today  
Spread your arms  
*Ready*  
Filled your lungs with cool air  
The wind pushing past  
Your unfastened red coat  
*Did you think of me?*  
How long did you hold  
That deep cleansing breath  
Before you exhaled

*Done*  
And stepped  
To your end?  
Of all the days...

*H*  
*a*  
*p*  
*p*  
*y*

*A*  
*n*  
*n*  
*i*  
*v*  
*e*  
*r*  
*s*  
*a*  
*r*  
*y*

*Julie Dominy Endres, The University of Iowa*

**Recession**

Bent beneath the weight of his world  
In need of peace of mind. Peace of heart.  
No longer the life he planned to have; once had.  
Taken in a moment. Gone.  
Swept up, no more than detritus in the flood.  
Swept up and left somewhere not planned.  
One step more and he's down, on the ground, with a load he can't  
bear.  
Lifting his eyes to see about him, prostrate all,  
Those he once blindly passed. Or judged.  
But also  
Among the invisible, the broken, the burdened  
Those who gather them up, bolster them.  
Who know the gossamer line between life planned and life  
interrupted.  
Who become the buttress to shore up the burdened life.

*Betsy Zmuda-Swanson, The University of Iowa*

My Dad  
Was a superb  
Fine craftsman  
What he couldn't do  
With children  
He could do with  
Wood  
Lead pipes  
Listen  
Respect  
Respond  
Make the finest tunings  
Impossible And imperceptible  
To Others

*Annie L. Ormsbee, University of Kentucky*

### **Refrain from the Burnout**

Phoenix rising. Or are we empowering clay pigeons?

Society's expendable menaces; untidy targets of abuse.

Icarus descending. Too many years. Too many clients. Too too  
much.

Monday's mail is a hum of the usual.

Insurance papers, a Conference on Poverty & PTSD, Sallie Mae.

And then this:

I finally got a job! Thanks for the tip. Depression not as  
bad either. Just thought I'd send you a Christmas card  
along with everyone else. You kinda feel like my family  
now. Thanks for everything. -Sam.

I remember Sam's account of the suicide attempt. Was it just six  
months ago?

A voice breaking and chirping with a hauntingly familiar cadence.

The caged bird sings to be heard, I suppose.

To fight against an imprisoning System, to be sure. But when the  
fighting doesn't Break the cage. When the mythology refuses to  
materialize,

To listen. To hear. And to realize:

Perhaps we all have cages from which we need to be rescued.

*Shawndaya Sabrina Thrasher, University of Georgia*

### **Mirror**

Who knew what the Jews would go through, likewise no guidelines  
could define the experience lived with the Slaves, many graves.

The horror it brings to recall the names that fought so dearly  
within, singing let freedom ring.

But the steady pace to fight for equality continues to be the face of  
our time, an inexcusable pace.

Not oblivious or blind...Mmm, I mimic the in between lines that  
are not solely defined by the bold capitalizations on color, race,  
and power fueled by money.

How funny the things we chose to idealize...A materialistic world  
mistakes we can't ignore, but many of us are walking around below  
poverty level, poor.

Built on a foundation of greed never mind who or what's in need,  
to take precedence over the important things.

I sigh in disbelief, YOU see, the concrete of humankind is being  
dragged right underneath our feet.

Not a time for text or tweet rather a true reflection of WE, YOU,  
and I...no time for pity, cries, or lies.

The needed future is nowhere near, I dare all to look within and  
recognize that absent change creates a society constructed on true  
failure, hazardous...Doom for Error.

*Linda Slayton, The University of Iowa*

**Ring around the Rosie**

In Columbine fields lay lives beyond broken  
Everyone talks, but no truths are spoken  
Among Hazard cities and in the Newtowns  
The Sandy Hooks grab us, more lives are laid down  
Trapped in the classrooms of innocence lost  
We barter our children with ultimate cost  
In dark Nickel Mines we share the Cold Spring  
Platitudes promised that don't mean a thing  
Amid the Red Lakes and in Burgs of Black  
We've gotten too good at turning our backs  
We seek Pearls of wisdom for Jonesboro pains  
Hold onto our horses, let go of the reigns  
We're starving the drought and feeding the flood  
Our children lay dying - We battle for blood

*Kevin Jones, Portland State University*

**The Trip**

I drove—she sat beside me, intent.  
This was not silence.  
I understand, I said, to make conversation.  
She spat on the window, let it drip down.  
She could have been my mother  
at that moment—  
I could have reached out and touched her.  
Instead I just drove her  
to pack her kids' things.  
I held the steering wheel firmly,  
and with extraordinary care.

*Rhonda J. Mash, University of Missouri, Columbia*

**Social Work**

So you want to change things,  
Only to realize sometimes you  
Cannot.  
Is  
All  
Lost?  
  
Wonderful things can happen.  
Open your heart.  
Reach for your  
Kismet and believe.

*Amanda C. Symmes, Boston University*

### **Keepers of the Truth**

Mapless, she is entrusted to navigate a world  
Created with the conditioned mind: blind and bleak  
Blasting blame and shame, never a name; a gritty snapshot, always  
the same.  
A black and white tundra where meaning is seldom made from  
“just do it” and “work harder” and “you aren’t trying hard enough”  
Awakened, she pushes through this rusty system of broken people  
breaking people  
Past worn faces, full of promise  
Complicated lives, worth living  
Elaborate stories, begging to be told  
Until she arrives at the light of the Truth, a beacon and guidepost  
Golden and brilliant, this Truth weaves itself into the fabric of each  
day  
So that together we may march on, holding the hands of children,  
Carrying the hearts of the homeless,  
Protecting the purpose of those cast aside and dismissed...  
We hold it all deep in our bones, for we are the Keepers of the  
Truth.

*Erin O’Connor, Wayne State University*

### **Brushstrokes**

Connecting. A tongue, skin tone, and ears that differ from my  
own...  
He fled his homeland, only to hear silence in a crowded room  
The two of us are *able*, but in diverse ways  
Communicating through gestures and written words, with smiles  
that require no translation  
Empowering. A web of pain, poverty, and injustice...  
She slaved on urban streets during starless nights  
The two of us find different means of survival  
Working toward self-acceptance with endurance that never runs  
dry  
Hopeful. A childhood marked by anger and grief...  
He struggled with change far beyond his years  
The two of us are shaped by unique memories  
Seeking solace and reflection in an afternoon game  
I grow, learn, reach, and strive...  
With my many brushstrokes, they paint their lives  
Works of art that color my days.

*Enid Midley, Loma Linda University*

**i was never here please**

it was a random day. he didn't know. she wouldn't say.  
STOP! was never on the table.  
he held her but she couldn't stay. it was out of their control. it was.  
out of their control.  
she slipped. into a memory. as it pulled her in she fought.  
she traced a line on his face searched his eyes with hers for  
something to hold on to. something to anchor her to this reality.  
he didn't know. she wouldn't say. STOP! was never on the table.  
he held her, but.. it felt good. but the memory was not.  
juxtaposed they formed a fog over her.  
he didn't know. she wouldn't say. STOP! was never on the table.  
he smiled.. he spoke.. he held her, but..  
it felt good, but the memory was not. they juxtaposed.  
he didn't know. she wouldn't say. STOP! was never on the table.  
she wiped her tear. i was never here.  
it was a random day.  
he didn't know. STOP! i was never here please.

*Sameer Rao, Bryn Mawr*

**Oppression Is**

Oppression is when social structures keep society unequal.  
Oppression is when people aren't taught that that's important.  
When black and brown kids learn to hate cops and social workers  
more than inequality.  
When white kids learn to hate black and brown ones more than  
inequality.  
  
Oppression is not knowing the solutions to fixing the world.  
Oppression is the delusion that you even think you know.  
Oppression is lack of agency or perception of that.  
Or anger at perception of lack of agency to fix anything.  
  
Oppression is me writing this poem or thinking I should.  
Oppression is me doubting my own voice because brown boys  
don't write poems.  
Or me not feeling connected to anyone at all, even other social  
workers  
Because social workers help people, they don't fix problems  
  
Oppression is grad school being necessary to advance  
Oppression is social work programs needing to exist  
Oppression is social work needing to exist

*Toni Mandelbaum, Bryn Mawr*

**Contrast**

Heart is pounding, blood is coursing, eyes will whisper tears;  
Searing burning, disbelieving, concretizing fears.  
People beating, children starving, others walking by;  
Beggars begging, rich collecting, as the denigrated die.  
Pictures marking, never leaving, feeling full of weak;  
Skin is thinning, disintegrating, humanity seems bleak.  
As she's reading, those are laughing, inflicting constant hurt;  
Callous damage, angry jeering, throwing mounds of dirt.  
Self-important, narcissistic, vane beyond repair;  
Justifying, righteous acting, thinking it's all fair.  
Some are born empathic brothers shouldering all pains,  
While others cause it, perpetrating, leaving bloody stains.  
What separates those who feel from those who can impose?  
A silent strength, a simple choice, lifting others from their foes.

*Kenneth Meisel, Wayne State University*

**15 Lines on Reconciliation**

The lonesome, shrieking bird that cries at night in the juniper tree  
outside your window is no bird at all. This you've come to know.  
You cannot help those who walk within that shrieking sound,  
for it is the way that dejection steals back those lost, who wander.  
My wife has a saying which goes like this: make every out-come  
a happy one. The woman at the clinic crashed her car, intoxicated.  
They tried to re-salvage her cello strings, but she's post-op now.  
I visited her at her bedside, but her eyes were pepper and glory.  
The world is made of those who either love or will not love  
the design that calls them back to a lone stool with a waiting cello.  
We borrow a soul that is a cello. We learn to play it. That's all.  
The melody we play is the joyful incantation inside the strings.  
All our days, everything, live for being exhumed in the strings.  
That's just the rule, that, & the self is made of fool's gold & valor.  
The purpose of the cello, in us, is to transfigure the self, bs & all.

*Joshua Ihnen, Colorado State University*

This priest, my friend, warned lenity is a sea  
and he, afflicted with benign spirit,  
might someday drown under waves of dearest-  
held compassion. Awash with misery,  
wretchedness, gloom. And, tempest-tossed, said he  
“The sea is nice—in summer—to visit,  
but endless tides erode without limit.”  
All this I heard, Father, but disagree.  
Though charity is an ocean, it’s true,  
I trust it is a place to live beside,  
upon, within. Longing as I so do  
to slip into the cold, unyielding tide  
and watch the rising sun turn gray to blue.  
Submerged in woes, I help them to subside.

*Sara Martinez, University of Minnesota*

### **Progressions**

Forgotten in a sea of similarity.

Beliefs, practices, ambitions, past,

Goals.

What potential is not read when it comes to matters of the heart?

How to not forget the purpose, and the dream?

How to not let go of the dream among the dream snatchers?

In a broken system;

a breaking system.

Breaking of self

without recreation.

We prove them wrong. We persevere. Because we are the same.

*Linda Deyo, The University of Iowa*

**Black**

They say "black is beautiful"

But when I was young I thought of it differently; Black was dirty,  
like mud or grease.

Black was confusing, like people I didn't understand, people who  
acted differently.

Black was dark and scary, like a ghost in the night.

But as grew older I learned I need not fear, for those black people  
were just the same as me.

So now when I see myself as beautiful, I see black is beautiful too.

*Michael Gregory, The University of Iowa*

**Grin and Bear It..**

A cold sweat glistens on the brow

Abuse and neglect haunt sleepless nights  
Tears and screams of past atrocities, flood sleepless dreams

Self-care...ha! only for those with time  
New cases fill the days, family goes forgotten  
On to the next case, no time for the weary  
Social work...it's not for the faint of heart  
Grin and bear it..

*Matthew G. Barnes, Humboldt State University*

**Light Blue Hue**

I awoke in a roundhouse surrounded by a light blue hue,  
The old ones called me to the open space around the fire,  
I understood the ancient language of the Sioux,  
I was told I wasn't the chosen one, but one who had chosen,  
To serve a chosen people who had been broken and re-broken,  
I drifted to sleep, still 21 years old with a life plan as far as my arm  
reached,

Not knowing I took with me a coal, with a light blue hue used to  
teach,

Every step I made since then lead me to contact with Native  
people,

Every time I make a difference I recall the light blue coal,  
Even more-so when I don't,

Did I miss my opportunity when the boy ended his journey?  
Did I say enough? Did I say too much?

Did I make up for it when the girl graduated and began her  
journey?

I was told I wasn't the chosen one, but one who had chosen,  
To serve a chosen people who had been broken and re-broken.

*Adnan Noor Munshi, Monmouth University*

### **A Tale of a Survivor**

It was a few years ago... when he crept and crawled into his caged  
dungeon of darkness.

Where no light flickered, and the spark of possibility non-existent,  
while the ice, freezing, cold blanket of hopelessness en-  
meshed his matching black heartless soul.

The brush he had used to paint the bright yellow and red colors  
somehow dipped into the black puddle of guilt. *But who  
was he to blame but himself?*

He was once the artist... Now it seemed that his passion melt down  
like clay, leaving him to be another empty figure in space;  
without obvious purpose, without vibrant life.

Some things changed though... sometime later... an unanticipated  
turn in time.

He stood up, smiled, proud of his shining teeth, warmly accepting  
the glitches in his perfection.

There was no need to escape. His room was a beautiful temple of  
peace and joy, and delight.

He found purpose and place in others' happiness; he found his  
dream he would live for.

He thanked his family, and he thanked his friends. He loved them  
oh so much.

He was happy. He was smart. He was confident. He was loved.

He was a survivor of his own mental warfares. And...

He writes for you today; stronger, more motivated, more powerful,  
more passionate *than ever*.

*Lena Moore, Loyola University of Chicago*

### **The Calling of a Social Worker**

We answer the call, when their hearts cry out in need

Through pain and through suffering, their souls we try to feed

The fears they face, while we work to help make them whole

A lifetime of uncertainty, their story starts to unfold

With compassion we serve and sometimes we can relate

As they dream of a better future and no more hopelessness they

have to face

As a test turns into a testimony and the meek becomes more strong

The resilience they've been searching for, we help them discover,

was deep inside all along

Nothing more noble than the calling, social worker is just our name

We are motivators, transformers, and healers just the same

We don't claim to be angels, we just answer the call of service when

it rings

But somehow when it's all said and done, I know we too, will get

our wings

*Carla Couch, Eastern Kentucky University*

### **To Have Met You**

To me, nothing in life is coincidental.  
When our paths met it was sentimental.  
You showed me understanding and offered me a safe place.  
Along with retrieving my little saving grace (my son).  
You had given me a special gift that seemed so surreal.  
The gift of a new life and you assisted me in making that real.  
Through your support and sharing of wise words.  
My eye's opened to see a new world.  
A world without inflicted pain or demeaning slander.  
Instead, a place with only love and laughter.  
You will never truly understand how thankful I am to have met  
you.  
I am, who I am today because of meeting you.

*Tricia Dove, University of Maryland-Baltimore County*

### **Promises**

I promise to find you a family and a place to call home  
I promise to never abandon you and let you make it all alone  
I promise that I'll help your parents so they won't get a divorce  
I promise that your classmates will never make you feel forced  
I promise to make the nightmares end and the good dreams start  
I promise to help you find hope and a loving heart  
To make all these promises you ask  
What did you give up?  
And I reply with the truth  
That I gave up a promise to me  
To take care of myself  
And never ever stop

*Angela Evans, The University of Iowa*

### **Too Soon**

She had always been like a sponge,  
soaking up bits of information.  
She worried about losing all of this...  
and then she actually did.  
She could tell by the puzzled looks  
She got from him.  
She tried to answer his questions and  
wanted to stop his furrowed brow.  
She knew he was important but  
could not tell anyone the reason.

*Melinda D. Ray, Gallaudet University*

### **One and The Other**

Solemn eyes peered from the entryway, uncertain if anybody  
would help.

One stood up and welcomed them with her hand.

*The Other rolled her eyes,  
wishing she could bury her head in the sand.*

With a glimmer of hope, they optimistically drew near.

*With anxiety in their hearts, they trembled with fear.*

Smiling, she asked, "How can I help you today?"

*Scowling, she harrumphed, much to their dismay.*

With open hearts, they revealed their tale.

*With empty emotions, they looked around to no avail.*

Spirits lifted, they walked out with a plan.

*Souls deflated, it was over before it began.*

One made a difference and not The Other.

*Kamala E-M Jackson, Adelphi University*

### **A Universal Struggle**

**R**ough, stagnant,

**A**nesthetized hearts

**P**ermanently

**E**nsconced by martyrs everywhere

*Jodi Kane, Adelphi University*

### **Toys in the Attic**

The hateful words of a parent, stored in the back of my mind- like  
so many toys in the attic.

Sometimes I take them out and play with them when I feel  
defeated.

I hear the voices saying "You can't!"

"You won't!"

"You are not good enough!"

Don't they know what their words can do?

The only way I know how to go on is to put them back on the  
shelf.

I will never forget the toys of my childhood but they will not define  
me.

I put them back on the shelf, away in the attic- and play with them  
no more

*Kelsey Marie Stout, University of Pennsylvania*

**Waiting**

“Come, get to know me,”  
Is the deepest cry of my heart.  
“Explore the halls of my soul,  
As our voices vibrate in harmony  
Let me lift you with my laughter  
And wait with me in reverent silence  
As my waves of sorrow lap the shore.  
I may not be that ‘special someone’  
The puzzle of my perspectives may not match yours  
Yet I am no less a song  
Longing for the applause of a deaf crowd  
Nor do I desire less  
The warm embrace and the melding of hearts.”

*Darnell Jackie Strong, Portland State University*

**A Black Male labeled as a Criminal**

At the grocery store looking for stuff hurriedly...cause time is  
*minimal*.  
Followed by a security guard because I’m a Black man, I must look  
like a *Criminal!*  
I leave the store angry, upset and feeling *confrontational*.  
Only to be stopped by the police for driving while Black, again la-  
belled as a *Criminal!*  
Finally home to safety but am upset, traumatized and feeling  
*irrational*.  
Turn on TV to relax but all I see are Black males on the news,  
Cops and Americas most wanted, maybe I am a *Criminal!*  
Finally to bed, eyes closed and praying to hopefully rid the  
*subliminal*.  
While thinking about my sons, grandsons and other Black males  
hoping in the future they won’t be labeled as a *Criminal!*  
Up in the morning shirt and tie, off to school and work, really  
*professional*.  
But as I step out the door I begin to tremble” why”?  
Because today’s another day I might be labeled as a Black male  
who is a *Criminal!*

*Stephanie Little, Minnesota State University*

### **The Essence of Social Work**

In a state of despair, I sat on the hospital floor, too tired to stand.  
My heart broke while I held onto my sister-in-laws cold hand.

The ICU was quiet as the doctor unplugged the monitor, sans our  
hysterical cries.

What do you do when someone you love (your family, your  
friend) dies?

Our family felt damaged and shattered because it was missing a  
prominent piece.

We were unsure of how to move on, but then came a worker that  
promised us peace.

She facilitated us through the heartache and provided us with the  
tools to endure.

When we thought we could not continue, she stood with us to help  
us feel secure.

With her words that brought us comfort and a sense of fellow  
feeling,

Our family began the extensive process of acceptance and healing.

Being supportive to help the broken is not an easy task to  
undertake.

It requires compassion and patience to ease another person's  
soulful ache.

This act of selfless service provides hope to those caught in a  
desolate sea.

And that is, in essence, what being a social worker means to me.

*Lou Storey, Monmouth University*

### **Socratic Expedition**

We dialogue change.

Beginning from what is known,

hazarding through blind spots, secrets,

venturing bravely forward into occupied darkness.

We fashion a knack for waiting, delaying, pausing, postponing,  
holding back flames, keeping time with inhospitable memories.

Tracking new pathways fresh lands revel themselves.

Impenetrable ancient outlawed grottos

Open to birthright commands.

Riddles transmute to verse,

radiant crescents restore,

diamonds astonish.

*Gretchen Scheffel, University of Minnesota*

### **Geriatric Social Work**

Gray hair,  
Pain is there,  
Help is needed,  
But where?  
  
Social workers come,  
Help for some,  
Pain goes numb.  
  
Hope for the old,  
Families are told,  
Emotions like gold.  
  
End of life to celebrate,  
People to elevate,  
To social work I dedicate.

*Florence A. Francis, Rutgers University*

### **I Am An Addict**

I am an addict; do you know my name?  
Have you seen my face? Are we all the same?  
  
I am an addict. I hold so much pain.  
  
I ran from my father, but I couldn't hide.  
And then my uncle, and a cousin too...  
Finally, a boyfriend left me black and blue.  
  
I am an addict; I hurt all inside.  
The drugs don't help me...they just let me hide.  
The drugs try to numb me. They don't last very long.  
And little by little...I see, it's all wrong.  
  
But now I'm an addict.  
  
Do you know my name?  
Have you seen my face?  
Are we all the same?

*Maria A. Reyna, University of Houston*

**The Heart of Social Work**

Social worker's put out several crises every day  
We often go unthanked, undervalued, and underpaid  
Every person we meet is a chance for change, to instill new hope  
and opportunity  
We work countless hours because we believe in this notion whole  
heartedly  
We chose this profession because we believe in the power of One  
One individual can make all the difference for someone  
While we may never see the positive effects of our casework  
We do believe that somewhere along the line we have impacted  
someone, and that in its essence is  
The Heart of Social Work

*Sharon A. Lacay, SUNY, Stony Brook*

**With You**

with a patient heart I hear your pain  
for you, things may never be the same  
I wish I could say what my heart wants to speak  
but I know deep down that is not what you seek  
an empathetic ear and a companion as you sink  
I see your resilience, despite what you think  
pick up the pieces and I will hold your hand  
the pain is real, I understand  
the story is yours, and yours alone  
but you had the strength to pick up the phone  
I'm glad I answered  
it shows how much I care  
to be with you in the moments  
That are just too much to bear

*Elizabeth Tubito, University of Pittsburgh*

**A Voice of the Vacant**

Mind your step - Past my bowing staircase and dodge the broken  
doll lying on my dusty floor.

**Careful where placing a breath - You know, I cannot support any  
more.**

I only house the mummified memories now that you disturbed  
with those prying keys.

**Excuse the stare of my window sockets - I am suspicious, you see.**  
Within me an abandoned life has fallen to disease so, tell me, are  
you just here to pity me?

**Respect the shelter made a tumbled tomb - My only offense is to  
have stood my ground.**

You say your job is to help and grieve? You know I lost my hearts  
to the paper greed?

**Come in, but do not run from my dark and creaking - Won't you  
listen to my crying?**

Paper caused my hearts to leave and with no paper they could not  
remain.

**Today, I serve no other purpose - I only house crime and decay in  
vain.**

Do not judge my fallen face as I pass time molding the air around.  
**With hearts again, I could be better - Do not let paper keep them  
away.**

Fix me and I will stand for more than those who beat for home  
one day.

*Aileen Holthaus, The University of Iowa*

"This is Julie"  
perky voice announces,  
"leave a message."

But now,  
Julie isn't taking messages  
or breaths.

Decided to stop  
dialysis,  
sick so long.

Probably  
won't be  
new message.

But possibly,  
"I'm not here."  
Have a good day."

*Arryel L. Womble, University of Central Missouri*

All people are created equal  
And in essence we are  
It is a beautiful imaginative thought  
It could also be a realistic thought but  
Power comes in and demolishes all that beauty and imagination  
Power confuses and separates people  
Something as beautiful as the brown of my skin suddenly makes  
    me ugly  
Less than  
Power perpetuates violence and hate  
Love goes on the back burner, with all its beauty and imagination  
Hope seems to be all we have left,  
However, Power is working on destroying that too...

*Samantha Garguilo, Adelphi University*

### **The Storm**

I live among the few who find comfort in the freezing cold, in the bolts of lightning and in the pouring rain.  
I'm one of the few who love the sights of lightning and the sound of thunder and the calming of the storm.  
Watching the rain come down and seeing the lightning strike and hearing the thunder roar gives me peace.  
Peace in a world where not many things can be calming.  
I believe that the perfect rain storm, with all the lighting and all the thunder can be magical and special and like nothing you've ever seen before.  
One storm is not like another, you will never find yourself watching the same scene over again, each one is unique and different from all the rest.  
And you'll find yourself still sitting out there when the rain seems to subside, when the thunder seems to end and when the lightning seems to have stopped.  
You will still be out there trying to catch one last glimpse of the beauty that is the lightning, the wonder that is the rain, the calming that is the thunder and the magic that is in the storm.  
You'll still be sitting, watching what seems to be nothing because you don't want it to end hoping for one last roar of thunder, one more bolt of lightning and one more drop of rain.  
When you find yourself watching a storm and it seems to have ended just wait a bit longer because you never know what you may see.  
You will know when the storm really passes, when the beauty and wonder and magic really ends.  
You may find yourself out there with no rain, and no thunder, and no lightning, but you will feel inside your heart when it's all over, when it ends for you.  
When you are ready to go back inside and leave the storm behind, you will feel ready because you know that the next one will be just as incredible as the last.

*Elizabeth Budd, Washington University, St. Louis*

### **Race Day**

Cheeks blushed by the November morning chill.  
Eyes widen in awe of the growing crowd  
gathering at the start line.  
Lips flutter in exchange among sisters.  
Clothes fitted for energetic movement  
layered and bold in color.  
Hands clap in praise of others and themselves.  
Feet fixed snugly into cushioned sneakers anxious and ready to  
bound!  
Horns echo as they charge forth without pause.  
Ponytails wave goodbye in grand concert  
to the walls that were once home.

*Lixia Zhang, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

I see you, a little girl sitting in a dark corner, lonely  
Your silent tears and wounds tell me your sadness and helplessness  
My heart is aching and trembling for you  
How can they hurt a beautiful angle like you  
I walk to you and hug you, gently but firmly  
You, desperately tell me you can never fly again  
No, that is no true Listen, I will never give you up  
I will help you fly again  
Fly like an angle, happily and fearlessly

*Sheryl Hoye, The University of Iowa*

### **Emotional Turbulence**

Healing begins before the fog clears,  
Clarity is in the stratosphere,  
Covered by a cold grey shroud of darkness,  
Radiant rays restore hope,  
The landscape changes with brightness  
  
Healing begins before the storm passes,  
Thunderheads swelling with turbulence,  
Welcome peace is on the horizon,  
The landscape changes with cleansing rain.  
  
Healing begins with a disturbance  
Resilience created as we weather each event,  
Tempest moves on  
The forecast is brighter  
Landscapes are forever changing.

*Megan Ponte, Washington University, St. Louis*

### **On Trauma and Self-Care**

Where did you go when you left your body?  
You were alone when I found you; were you looking to be free?  
I was your advocate, but I never understood  
How you could hide in the darkened corners of your mind.  
A disappearing act, an amazing sleight of hand.  
Now, I look in the mirror and find  
We are not so different,  
Though I'm not sure which one of us was the one to survive.  
I was your advocate, but I couldn't save you.  
Looking back, I'm not sure how hard I tried.  
I became the one numbing and running away,  
Then I'd find you in the night and tell you I'm sorry.  
I'd alter the details of that day to make it earlier inside.  
When I wake, I see the advocate I need to be now is mine.

*Lloyd H. Sidwell, The University of Iowa*

### **Losing Me**

Thankful for those memories past -  
It's there in comfort they last.  
Now, concern and worry -  
Not as planned for ending this journey.  
  
It was always clear -  
Directions, and how to get there.  
Now an increasingly clouded lens as one tries to see  
What is too soon to be.  
  
Losing one's way, yet so wanting to stay.  
What can one do to be as always with you.  
  
But it appears quiet there - a solitude, peace -  
When my search is to cease.  
Oh why not now as it used to be?  
Sad to be losing me.

*Christa Orfitelli, The University of Iowa*

Apprehension, heartbeat, sweat  
Entering for the first time ever.

Will I have to bare my soul  
Or talk about 'how does that make you feel?'

Like you see in movies,  
My only reference.

But by the end,  
That wasn't so bad.

I felt listened to,  
Heard.

I trust this person  
It will be okay, I am okay.

Therapy, counseling  
Social Work.

*Sandra Blackburn, University of Pennsylvania*

### **Our journey**

long before you came my way I prepared for you  
empathy, theories, practice  
to be present for you  
to hear you  
to support you  
my space became our space ...  
and for a while we tended to some things  
we untangled some things  
we walked on the rocks, not around them  
tears cleansed, truth resonated, laughter punctuated  
the sun dappled our space as we talked  
we always found your strengths  
your path, our journey, my honor & joy  
to see you grow  
to see you whole

*Heather Rose Burcham, University of Michigan*

### **Hands and Feet**

Is my heart big enough to hold you? Your past, your pain, your fears.  
Will I burst, cry, or break? Will you crush under my tears?  
Are my eyes clear enough to see you? Behind the guarded smile.  
Am I insightful to understand? Will I make this time worthwhile?  
Are my hands strong enough to reach you? To touch a stranger's wound.  
Will their trembling alarm you? Will they be empty, or intrude?  
Are my feet fast enough to catch you? Steady to ground us both.  
Will they lead you astray? Will they be too paralyzed for growth?  
My heart is big enough to hold you, though I may cry, or ache your pain.  
My eyes are clear enough to see you, though I may have to look again.  
My hands are strong enough to reach you, to connect us hand-in-hand.  
My feet are fast and steady, to walk together down your path.  
I am here to be your witness; that is my gift to you.  
With an open heart I receive, your story, long and true.  
Together we move; hands and feet.

*Carolyn Sue Lukrofka, The University of Iowa*

### **Honoree**

First breath—— gasp—: wa! wa!  
daughter  
student  
wife  
mother  
grandmother kids on laps  
I do not know you  
Open window - freedom to walk home  
Eat, eat, please eat.  
Last breath ——gasp —— w h o o s h

*Lori Culbertson Harris, The University of Iowa*

**Disabilities Parking Space Rights  
Placard Hanging from My Rearview Mirror**

I was so low  
on milk. You pointed, your head shook.  
I was so low,  
the magical loupe at your brow.  
Pain, madam, hides deep in backrooms  
where thee shan't judge cover or book.  
I *was* so low.

*Marisol Lado, Rutgers University*

**Longing**

The memories of you flow through my mind as a dandelion pedals  
through the air.  
Sadness begins to seep out of my pores.  
A tumor has formed in my heart competing with its beat.  
Emptiness vibrates throughout my body, wants to explode out the  
seams of my veins.  
I cry invisible tears because you're not here to comfort them.  
A simple glimpse of you will put me back together.

*Robert Wallace, Western Michigan University*

**In The Wake of the End of Things**

I don't know how long this particular high-rise has been here,  
or the dozens of other high-rises, assisted-living facilities,  
nursing homes,  
and other places where I visit the elderly.  
I imagine as one person dies and the next person moves in,  
only for that person to also die,  
the accumulation of dust; of time ephemeral.  
By its very nature, dust eludes us.  
It collects in corners, underneath beds, along baseboards  
like gravel beside a road,  
tiny particles of skin and hair.  
I imagine, too, a scientist from the future,  
scooping from an unclean spot years of debris,  
placing the cells of numerous older persons under the  
microscope—the gray hairs, bits of lipstick, eyelashes,  
fragments of nail—and this pile of DNA, this coagulation of life,  
speaking to this scientist, telling him about everything she knows,  
everything he doesn't.

*Jessica Gray, Grand Valley State University*

Define Social Work

Define me

We are guides, sounding boards, and confidants

I change, we change, the work changes

To bring comfort to those who feel alone

We are teachers, advocates, and supporters

I change, we change, the work changes

To meet another where they're at

We are connectors, leaders, and mouth pieces

I change, we change, the work changes

To build community where there is none

We are present, we are strong, we are hopeful

I change, we change, the work changes

Us

*Alexandra Pappas, Barry University*

**Grateful**

So many cries from deep within  
to find answers for my own addiction.

Letting my life go by year after year  
driven by the relentless craving and fear.

Dreading the sun's morning light  
to be awakened by a vicious fight.

Sick and tired of this cowardly life

I choose to get help and end the strife.

A social worker reached out their hand  
and motivated me to take a firm stand.

Every day I got better and grew to love  
myself and the man or woman above.

Eventually I grew emotionally and spiritually  
and dared to begin a new life fearlessly

A second chance and a grateful social worker I am.

*Mercedes Samudio, University of Southern California*

**Light and Darkness**

I came to your fragile darkness

With the light given to me

By learning and training.

The swell of pride and motivation

Overpowered the struggle and fear

From the damages you experienced

With trepidation and guilt, you fled.

And with righteousness and sorrow, I followed -

Attempting to hand you my light.

As a result, your harsh edges softened,

My resolved shifted into understanding,

And we each parted with a little more light and darkness

*Ngozi Ijeoma Eke, University of Michigan*

**Don't Laugh** (Poem about bullying)

Don't laugh at me

I'm you and you're me

Don't you know?

We are entwined

Two halves of one

You, me

I, you

Don't laugh at yourself, please.

*Jeffrey Sharlein, Hunter College, CUNY*

**Person in Environment: 3 Haikus on Political Economy**

- i. “Fundamental . . . is attention to the environmental forces . . .”  
(from the NASW Code of Ethics preamble)
- ii. Funding foundations and governments pay us to help people adjust.
- iii. neighborhood: there are no jobs. Ex-cons can't vote. Cop cars on pot-holed streets.

*Martha Schut, The University of Iowa*

**s. w. repartee**

civil elbow grease  
considerate sweat  
neighborly muscle  
accessible mission  
communal walk  
nimble-witted day job  
big eared diligence  
skillful calling for fancy footwork  
street smart best shot  
(more than nine to five)  
not born yesterday way of life

*Aaron Braverman, Columbia University*

**Ambassadors of Hope**

It is our commission to invoke hope  
Agents of promise must understand  
Without prospect of possibility wishes dissolve  
Optimism is a referendum on despair  
Relief from adversity and misfortune  
Faith shakes off the specter of poverty  
Dreams persuade to forge ahead  
Possibility fights the tribulations of illness  
Ambassadors of hope recognize  
No false promises or expectations  
Tomorrow can be different

*Virginia Carol Brewster, Concord University*

**Retirement Not Me**

**R** - Reminiscing About Days of Old  
**E** - Early I would rise  
**T** - To work I would go  
**I** - Infants were my concern  
**R** - Recall all of their abuse and neglect  
**E** - Elderly were my concern  
**M** - Memories of them being lonely and abused  
**E** - Eager to assist those in Need  
**N** - Never shirking my social work duty  
**T** - Teenagers were my concern  
  
**N** - Noting the challenges they faced each day  
**O** - Opting to be there for them all  
**T** - Telling them all is well  
  
**M** - My success derived from protecting them  
**E** - Enforcing the law was my duty

*Jessica Dean, Barry University*

### **How are the children?**

My children are proverbs  
spitting fire.

I want to be brave like them  
confronting violence.

There are things I want to teach them  
but they'll have to learn on their own.

It's a warrior's journey  
they take with a child's face.

Some will sell their potential  
to false dreams.

Others will reach beyond limitations  
grasping for what is rightfully theirs.

Our children are reflections  
showing us what needs to be healed.

The children are not well.

*Scott E. Provost, University of Pennsylvania*

### **A Brave New World**

Social work practice in the trenches

Brief treatments and interventions are the new clinical conventions

Interviewing clients in homes, clinics, hospitals, jails, and park  
benches

Maintaining public safety

Remaining unruffled under pressure in the community

Respecting autonomy

Confronting ethical quandaries

Mitigating risks and danger, deescalating anger

Sleepless nights

Second guessing and uncertainty, leaving palms sweaty

Believing everything was done within legal rights

Checking and re-checking clinical progress notes, trying to cope

If it is not documented, it wasn't done!

Wait, there is room for hope

Learn from mistakes but do not admit fault!!

*Rebecca Price, Mount Mercy University*

**Does anyone have a pen I can borrow?**

Writing opinions, recommendations and plans.

No time in between to watch the ink dry.

Our signature, our words written as black and white.

These pens should writes in circles not strokes.

A way back to the beginning.

To erase worry, depict a journey.

Write positivity, leak encouragement and draft hope.

This pen can be found in every office, every home.

It might be lost.

Or it might be needing a refill.

This happens from time to time

No pen has infinite ink.

It's OK to put it down, take a break, watch the ink dry.

When it's picked up again, delete the strokes.

And watch circles fill page, after page, after page.

*Martin Booth Tracy, University of Illinois at  
Champaign-Urbana*

**Roma Child**

*There was a child went forth every day, and the first object he looked upon and  
received with wonder or pity or loss or dread, that object he became.*

Walt Whitman

A diminutive, dark Roma child sits sedately

on a crudely torn piece of cardboard

in the middle of a busy sidewalk

under the hot summer sun of a bustling Balkan city.

She cuddles a doll. Gently caressing it as she rocks slowly,

rhythmically to the strains of a melody only she can hear

amid the din of horns and heavy traffic.

Throngs of people stream by staring straight ahead,

impassive save for a sporadic toss of a coin

or piece of fruit onto the cardboard.

Hours pass. She does not move from the position

to which she is riveted by mindless devotion to the mother

who hovers hidden behind the trees,

across the street, warily watching, waiting to take her home,

Until she returns tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow.

*Alexandra McKnight, University of North Carolina,  
Chapel Hill*

**generational curse**

he had years and weight  
behind his fists  
and daily did she pay  
for her transgressions—real or imagined  
he said, without doubt there can be no faith  
his mantra, the crux of his power  
without doubt, there can be no faith  
and while she took her lashings  
believing his glory in each one  
curled up, tonka truck fists  
hid in the shadows  
watching and learning from  
The Father

*Tammice Twinette Johnson, University of Central  
Missouri*

I was blind  
Wow I can't believe how blind I been  
Even though I wear glasses or have my contacts in  
It took me losing you to finally see  
How much you really really meant to me  
Someone please hand me sunglasses and a cane  
So I can maybe get some humor out of this pain

*Jesse Wateman, University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

**Group**

They gather filtering through the cold and smoke, scented  
Like the half-smoked and saved Newport 100  
Collecting against the oil stains  
Of 2005 Target rack Dickies  
Circled they roar crudities, obscenities spoken to  
Guffaws and cackles; mumbles vibrating stubble of  
Chins, cheeks, and chairs-whispering warnings  
To the fretful new, still searching eyes for a new home  
Some can't sit, and pace in front of the percolator  
Draining sugar and cream, or leaving it tarred black  
Thick and soulful, sipping softly.  
But then they sing, in soft soprano, slicing through the eerie  
Calm of the room; carrying over all of Neuve Chapelle to bless  
another fearful soldier- tears dropping into the chimes of black  
coffee

*Laura Riddle Parry, University of Utah*

### **Finished Product**

The social worker's heart is bent and stretched  
    Expanding enough to hold the sorrow  
    Like clay, is molded by tears and toils  
The artist's masterpiece hangs in a gallery  
    A colorful display of time and talent  
    Each brushstroke, drawing admirers  
The scientist's data published in a journal!  
    Discovering cures and uncovering clues  
    Helping humanity stamp out disease  
The reporter's story put on paper  
    Researched, rewritten, and received  
    A mark forever left in ink and on readers  
The social worker carries their work with them,  
    in their bent, stretched, open, hopeful  
    heart.

*Amber Rose, The University of Iowa*

### **Fortune Cookie**

Somewhere between the egg drop soup  
and sweet and sour chicken  
you leaned across the table, as you began to whisper  
"You're still lookin' for Daddy..."  
you took my breath away  
bursting into tears I knew I'd never forget that day  
  
We cried because we missed him  
I sobbed because you cared  
your words they meant the world to me, an intimacy shared  
  
Finding a man like Daddy, it seemed a bit too late  
but knowing that you understood  
made it worth the wait  
  
I'm glad you lived to see, my fortune did come true  
I am so very grateful  
I owe it all to you

*Jamie Downs, West Virginia University*

Corners of the world,  
boundary of the space,  
placement of the stars,  
features of the face.

Fingers on the hand,  
memories of the mind,  
direction of the sun,  
obstacles that will bind.

Richness of the earth,  
emotions of a child,  
signals on a sign,  
blackness of a mine.

Out of the corners and what we see there,  
We can plant a seed of hope and care.

*Jamie Murphy, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay*

### **The Journey**

A little girl trapped in darkness,  
With her beating heart full of light,  
It was the hope inside her soul that helped her fight and take off in  
flight.

Always longing and never fulfilled within herself,  
Addiction reached out and grabbed her, trapping her inside a cage,  
It felt like shame, remorse, fear, loneliness, and rage.

Then something magical happened that would change her heart  
forever,

A child was born and a mother she became,  
With this she saw light again and would never be the same.

She realized that life wasn't about her anymore nor had it ever  
been,

As a single mother on welfare, she put herself through school,  
She became a social worker, using her pain as an empowerment  
tool.

My journey was needed, purposeful, and great,  
But this story isn't just mine nor yours or a client's-but it's the  
reality of everyone,  
That it is only by helping others that we get warm by letting in the  
sun.

*Chelsie Wohlers, Luther College*

**To See the Change**

A flicker of crimson and gold breaks the endless sea of midnight  
A thin tendril of curling iridescent smoke floats gently to the stars  
The small burning flame slowly creeps towards the end of its life  
    source  
Knowing that although it's being sustained, it's flickering out  
    rapidly  
Knowing that the harder it works, the faster it will go out  
To be slowing burning out by the very thing giving strength is a  
    terrifying thing  
But the sensation can never be felt if the flame is never lit  
The help cannot be given if the helper never tries  
Because there is always another cigarette in the pack  
There is always another reason to keep trying  
To help others, we move past the things that hold us back  
And cling to the things that propel us further  
Because the satisfying feeling of being fueled is worth the short  
    lifespan of the flame  
And to see the change in another is worth the little bit that we give  
    away

*Sharon Lynn Simmons, University of Kentucky*

**'Twas the Night before Finals**

'Twas the night before finals and all through my house,  
The emails were arriving by the click of a mouse.

While I was grading papers and preparing for the day,  
The excuses were pouring in with a colorful array.

I opened my inbox while the alert was still sounding,  
To read about their mishaps, some of them were astounding!

It seemed there were plagues of all kinds about,  
One student had Cholera, another, the gout!

There were several dead grandmas, car accidents and the flu,  
Lost zip drives and computer crashes, with students asking what to  
do.

I considered my options and drew up my chair,  
I opened each email and responded with care....  
The final is tomorrow, I hope to see you there!

*Ayrin L. Hnosko, Widener University*

It is you and I  
In this room.  
Your fears, your worries, your life.  
Your history, your future.  
The troubles of present that keep you awake each night  
And prevent you from living each day.  
Let me hold those barriers for just this time.  
Let me hold them, reframe them and  
Present them back to you at the end  
In a way that gives you strength to move forward  
And make small changes that add up to growth  
That you will tell me all about when next you return  
To this room  
With you and I.

*Fred Franck, The University of Iowa*

### **The Journey**

We share a journey on an uncertain road,  
The sign posts faintly lettered and misplaced,  
The pain “a thinly wrapped enigma”  
Escape barely visible through the mists of the mind,  
Let us find courage as we walk together,  
Burdens lightened as we make our way,  
No longer alone, take my hand.

*Abigail Dembo, University of California, Berkeley*

### **To Everyone Who Has Stood in Line**

Six o'clock in the morning.  
The mothers have the welfare office surrounded.  
They sway and bob.  
When, tick-tock,  
The gateway brays its opening.  
The men begin to pitch and sway.  
They've undergone a loss of vigor,  
And an attendant physical change.  
The powerful force made its way.  
Regularly unrestrained.  
A hundred babies rode that day.  
See men to the left of them.  
See men to the right of them.  
Put out to sea on the shoulders of they that bore them.

*Jean Filsaime Pierre, Rutgers University*

Social workers are open-minded to suggestions,  
Outstanding characteristics, skills, and passion.  
Considerate discussions illuminate resolutions,  
Inspire others to develop successful motivation.  
Acceptance ears lead to long-term associations,  
Legal threats do not intimidate their actions.  
We, as one, fight for our students and family,  
Outpouring our heart and soul in our community.  
Respecting and loving our diverse areas daily,  
Kneeling and praying for our own “call” of duty.  
Empathize with the have and have-not respectfully,  
Resourceful against many challenges with humility,  
Social Workers are essential life-changers in Society.

*Ralph V. Muzny Jr., University of Missouri Saint Louis*

### **Abused and Neglected Children**

Somewhere off in the dark of night I hear faint screams of children  
being neglected and abused,  
It is so sad why modern day society let children be neglected and  
abused while many adults act as if they either bewildered or  
just downright confused.  
Morning comes and somewhere close to my home I see a couple  
of little children getting onto a yellow school bus with un  
washed clothes,  
The children’s’ unkempt situation is something I loathe.  
  
How these lonely kids are fed and dressed differently is hardly a  
fault of their own,  
In this same world people make time to feed a dog a nice looking  
bone.  
The abused and neglected children are huddled together to stave  
off the cold of the day,  
Hoping someone will help show them what they believe is their  
best hope for an alternative means of living a safe and  
comfortable day.

*Ana Francis, Adelphi University*

### **The Fabric of a Social Worker**

Movements produce awareness and create history.  
Equality and justice are embedded in the schemes of our existence.  
The fabric that makes up a social worker is composed of many  
shaded threads of love, genuineness, empathy and  
compassion.  
A social worker is not just a voice or a mere echo, it is a  
movement!  
One who is courageous by being a change agent. So, who am I ?  
I am one who takes the roles of initiator, mediator, negotiator,  
counselor, educator and advocate.  
One who conquers obstacles and challenges in a fierce fight against  
oppression.  
Refusing to give up effortlessly for the cause of others.  
One who promotes self-efficacy and resiliency throughout all  
boundaries and ethnicity.  
A restorer of hope, strength, dignity, resiliency and empowerment.  
An individual of inner commitment, compassion and confidence,  
who is willing to extract the best from the worst.  
A social worker stands influential not only in the now, but the  
future, to be the change.  
I am an abundance of extraordinary wealth to enrich the many  
lives of those I will encounter.

*Shaina Smith, University of Missouri, Columbia*

### **The Box**

I have been put in a box, cast aside on a shelf;  
as you build up your power and wealth.  
A living thing needs space to grow; in this cage there is no room to  
sow.  
Your mantra is, "Out of sight, out of mind."  
Do you know those with perfect vision can be the most blind...  
Like the Sun behind a cloud, I struggle to shine;  
while you continue to reign over me and mine.  
Put me in a box, if you must; take away my strength, my trust.  
But you will never gain my will to live, to see there is more that I  
have to give.  
One day the lid will be lift'd away; then you will hear all I have  
been trying to say.  
Absconding your shame, to your own box you will flee;  
and I will know how it feels to be free...

*Arielle Lee Bair, Marywood University*

### **Setting Fire**

I have enough heart for a crowd.  
My voice is loud, my steps are quick  
I run to help; I light the wick.  
A fire was lit and I'm going to burn -  
Learn. Yearn to teach. And reach  
The city, the state, the coast, the country, the world.

Just one person, one voice -  
A conscious choice, a drop in the ocean  
For a greater good, I'm set in motion.  
And why do we keep on keeping on  
And sing this song, even when it feels so hard?  
The windows barred, the beauty scarred  
The world so marred, and all on guard...

To be the flame. To set the fire.  
To give the tools. To go forth and inspire.

*Ryan Burton, Washington University, St. Louis*

### **The Deep Freeze**

Dark times of fear, dark times of waning dreams.  
He lived to learn that even stars have trouble shimmering.  
Those broken mornings wore down a steady soul.  
He longed for help where the good men met through haze and city  
roads.

He loved like truth under those purple nights.  
Blind to the clouds around him by the promise of moonlight.  
The winter screamed into the tired heights. Without any reverie  
and the trails of lesser times.

There he smiled. Without any walls he smiled.  
Through shrieks and shivers he smiled.  
The deep freeze melted goodbye and the light came in time to see  
his clear eyes.

Bright times of joy, bright times of waxing dreams.  
He lived to learn that even fate is not unwavering.  
Those broken mornings, strengthened a stretching soul.  
He found truth where the deep freeze melted and made those  
streets a home.



*Sherry Lynn Warren, University of Kansas*

### **Mending**

A sock hangs off the rocker arm, needle and thread still dangling  
from the toe.

Dishes with breakfast drying to a granite crust wait in the sink for  
godliness.

Bright red geraniums wilt in the morning heat on the windowsill.  
A color so startling that only a whore would wear it.

She smears on scarlet veneer - a blend of crushed insects and wax -  
not to attract the attention of pleasure-seekers, but to call  
out a smile for those who need one.

To brighten the gray lives that have forgotten the vibrancy of joy,  
those that know the subtle shades of diversity and  
difference.

She heads out into the sunshine, whose rays of scorch and bright  
do not reach between the buildings.

She steps behind the skyscrapers where the deals are made into the  
shady alleys where life really takes place.

There, she coaxes forth resources from rust, abundance from  
ashes, resiliency from wrong-doing.

Every day she sees the disenfranchised, the unsteady, lives  
permanently stained by circumstance or choice.

Does it matter which? It doesn't. Free will is an illusion created for  
those with the privilege and means to use it.

She is a social worker, and this is the sermon she spreads. A dream  
of hope, of possibilities.

A dream from which one wakes, comes out from the shadows, and  
feels the sun kissing your forehead.

*Michael Arends Alksnis, University of Maryland*

From the day I was born I gasped for air,  
the vapors of prejudice thick in my chest and  
the weight of judgment heavy on my eyelids  
as the righteous piteously laid me to rest

My path was set before I awoke  
in a world carved  
in the shape of a funnel by  
invisible hands who no one claims to possess

Slipping steadily toward the center,  
uttering inaudible cries of distress  
as shoppers shop and workers work and  
everyone says they are doing their best

I close my eyes as I fall  
They claim to know, but I truly see

Mine is the voice of poverty

*Danielle Aubin, Humboldt State University*

### **One Thousand Disguises**

Then said a student, "Speak to us of Social Work."  
And her eyes brightened and filled with tears, with a soft, delicate voice she began to speak:

How can the moon ever thank the sun for illuminating her surface so that she may gaze upon the earth and reflect the world's sorrow and happiness?

Those who seek to give thanks for serving others show us their hearts that reflect the love and grace behind the disguises of characters, roles and stigma that hide us from ourselves,

Jung once said we meet ourselves again and again in thousands of different disguises on the path of life,

If we focus only on the moon's reflections, we may drown ourselves in the waters of despair, forgetting that we seek what is behind the reflections, the source of the light which unites us all,

We can only realize this when we see ourselves in each community,

When we see ourselves in every child, every person and every thing,

We will know this only when we feel each bomb, each pang of hunger, each cold night on the street as our own pain, our own experience and as our own call to serve.

*John Dennis McBride, The University of Iowa*

### **Never Forget**

On December 6, 1941 Nazi soldiers made them slaves until they were lost to us, became a chilling, dehumanized number in the ghastly Final Solution wherein six million Jews died.

Now outside their home what does the passer-by see?

Four brass plaques embedded in the sidewalk,

Inscribed with names and death-dates of that entire family.

Forever they bear witness in that place to the shoah, the immolation-

Of all the world's shameful genocides, the unspeakably worst.

Gunter Demnig started this program,

Called his brass markers "stolpersteine," "stumbling stones,"

Neighbors went to court, denounced them as despicable objects,

Acts of abject surrender, devaluing their homes.

"Didn't their boots kick us before, and wasn't that enough?"

A rabbi asks, "will they walk again all over our bones?"

Exactly. Yes.

*Weidi Qin, Washington University, St. Louis*

**In search of beacon**

The poor, the unsheltered  
The vulnerable, the unprotected  
The colored, the unaccepted  
In search of beacon, in the ocean of darkness  
Each man - part of the entire -  
Reminds me constantly, the mission  
To listen, to understand  
To plant the flowers of hope

*Chris Petr, University of Kansas*

**Scared of the Light**

Can you turn on the light?  
    No man, I don't want to.  
Please turn on the light.  
    No way. It's too scary.  
What? Come on, just do it.  
    I really don't want the light on.  
But it's not scary.  
    Easy for you to say, man. Easy for you to say.

*Thom Schramm, Case Western Reserve University*

**The Carpenter**

I remember when I fell from that rafter  
sunlight hung on an angle through the window  
and a strip of lead broke the light  
into two sheets divided by a rod of shade.  
In my falling I tried to grab the shade, as if  
that thin ghost of a frame would save me  
simply because my hand could fit around it.  
The wide and hardly graspable light  
blinded me as I dropped to the marble floor.  
Later, the same light woke me and was a comfort  
when the shade only chilled me  
with a memory of my body.

*Amy Correia, The University of Iowa*

**A Transgender Journey**

*why do people think i'm a boy* she asks from the back seat of the  
car  
i think carefully and want to respond thoughtfully i believe the way  
I answer is important  
she is a girl who feels like a boy inside  
a dysmorphia hard to understand  
*do you worry about his future*  
*i wish he could have remained a girl who was a tomboy*  
a state of being unimaginable to many  
difficult to accept  
desire to protect him so strong it hurts  
hormone therapy new name surgery  
a daughter now a son a sister now a brother  
I look back and see the signs of his life pointing in this direction  
and that comforts me  
finding the boyhood within the girlhood of his childhood

*Honor Heindl, Washington University, St. Louis*

**for the mater dolorosa of the gugulethu seven**

the calloused heart of a black south african man  
does not vindicate causing another's blossoming lungs to  
prematurely wilt, but  
mbelo, "my child, my son"  
this perpetual rhythm of suffering must end  
  
i know you have felt the imprint of the white man's shoe upon your  
skull  
our people's blood has crossbred minerals  
sown along the indian to the atlantic  
but they did not pass in vain  
  
history cautions hope on this side of the grave,  
but no longer must we let stone encapsulate our organs,  
while God has painted our canvases in different hues,  
our veins all pump a tenacious, vibrant red through weapons the  
size of our fists  
we must keep fighting, keep loving  
  
behold, oh cape town, here comes the sun

*Victoria Goebel, University of Georgia*

**Reach for the Light**

Sometimes you don't see a way out, a way forward.

Do not despair.

Lean and stretch and reach for the light.

Feel your way through the darkness if you must.

Go down to the earth and crawl

You hear it off in the distance...

Your name is being called.

Move that way if you can.

If you cannot, it is enough to open your eyes a little.

Do you feel something different?

I think it is a dot of light that way.

Head toward that glimmer.

You start to notice beautiful things again.

Your eyes are open now.

Someone is there.

*Anna Santaga, The University of Iowa*

I love what I am going to be

A pillar of strength drenched in every color

Every shape of hand will imprint itself on me

I will bend my mold for its impression

But I will always be a pillar

The beautiful things that hearts are made of

Are all different textures

Shall they unravel at my feet

I will kneel

You cannot know

I have a bird in my chest

And she flits with delight at the idea

That I can hold diamonds

Where the world sees only dirt.

*Greg Nooney, Loyola University*

### **Therapist**

First the top of the iceberg  
Burning through this drama and that,  
But can you feel inner water bubbling up?  
No, it is coming from out there.  
I'm sure of it.

What if the river turned to steam?  
Or if the iceberg turned upside down?  
Snowing me, or snowing the self,  
Frozen, liquid, or steam, it's still water.  
Let it flow.

Mama pain, father pain, violation, betrayal,  
Fragmentation.  
How can I listen hour after hour?  
No vessel big enough to hold all that water.  
Only the breath, only the breath.

*Dawn E. Freeman Schulte, University of Missouri, St. Louis*

Meet me here. In this place.

This place where time is irrelevant. No minutes... No hours... No days... Measureless and relentless.

This place where yesterday is strange and memories of last week no longer call. Last week - the time I lived in Ordinary. But time is irrelevant.

This place where panic thrives -  
In my chest, allowed only shallow breaths under the weighted shroud of dread.

In my heart, keeping rapid pace with manic thoughts.

This place where my thoughts revolt, holding me hostage in a story I never penned. A biography against my will.

This place where no one knows what to say or how to help...to reach...to rescue. Banalities send me further into this place, and they further away. Into Ordinary.

This place where grief cloaks me in obscurity as I will the rest of me to fade away completely.

I don't live in Ordinary anymore.

Please meet me here instead; so I'm not alone. So I'm not afraid.