THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
School of Social Work

National Poetry Contest for Social Workers

2016 Fourth Edition
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Ryan Adams</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Adamson</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Ahearn</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke Andregic</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derwin C. Barnett II</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia J. Bellone</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Boykin</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharaine Markay Conner</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Cook</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica B Cornell</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasey Craig</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Crumpler</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Davis</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Delgado</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Dolaty</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrie Normand DuCote</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany Elaine Dwyer</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Edwards</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylie Erickson</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Scott Feagans</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandi Fliegelman</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Forde</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth Forwood</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trystan Gangi</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Garlock</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Ann Getse</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ty Edwards Graef</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Greenbaum</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige Hector</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique E. Hessell</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meisha Holmes-Wright</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Johnson</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam McNown Johnson</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Joseph</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Judge</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Kaufman</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich H. Kenney, Jr.</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Khong</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Leff</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Alan London</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Lopez</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Maher</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Malekoff</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Martinez</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey May</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget McGlade</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Moreau</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Mosher</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Mueller</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Myers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella Padnos-Shea</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie Parks</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Riddle Parry</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Paul</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrah Port</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie Reed</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Ricks</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis Saddler</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather Saposnick</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan P. Shannon</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Smith</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Smith</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camina Stevenson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Symmes</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiko Taku</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callie Thomas</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Thomas</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Yvette Tovar</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie M. Trask</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Trotta</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Veno</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Mae Welchert</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Williams</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefany R. Wolfe</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Wolfson</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane M. Wright</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clas.uiowa.edu/socialwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed by Jefri Palermo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The judges for the 2016 contest were:

- **Ellen Szabo**, M.Ed., founder and director of *Write Now*, 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;

- **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;

- **Max Seifert** studies poetry at the University of Iowa. His first chapbook, *The Hole of Everything, Nebraska*, won the 2015 Florence Kahn Award from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. He is a research fellow at the International Writing Program and a poetry editor for *earthwords: the undergraduate review*.

---

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

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.

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.

The first, second, and third place winning poems are published in The New Social Worker. This magazine is available free, on-line: http://www.socialworker.com

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 nineties 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, then 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.

For those interested in participating in the 2016-17 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.givetoiowa.org/socialwork
I take solace in the company of the spirit of my beloved
My eternal and forever guardian and terrorist of my heart
His words penetrated deep into the recesses of my soul, and wore me like
the vest to stop a bullet
How I fought to protect you from the dangers of this fallen world.
He swallowed his joy, that elusive assailant; temporary tourniquet to the
wounded
Embraced and abused, we ran as one body as we moved Like scars
across the stars...
His idle hands made vain scratches at the sun, for he always wanted that
light that felt so out of reach
I watched as his frail frame broke, poorly constructed and drunkenly
held together, until it slipped away...like sand through my finger tips
And like a mirage in the desert, he was gone
Like a memory I see him standing in the distance with a cigarette and a
smile, and I tell myself that love lost is better than no love at all
And wonder what mad man came up with such a lie
It was always you and I.
I take solace in the company of the spirit of my beloved...
We were both trapped in the same wave
But you cast yourself out to sea...So the boat would save me

dresses are like nightgowns, they’re not safe, she says, a
ball on the couch in my office where i sit silently wishing
to find her elusive safety. she continues, shaking but
breathing, and says again: nightgowns aren’t safe. as if i
hadn’t heard it the first time, hadn’t imagined her as a girl
waiting for santa or the easter bunny or the tooth fairy or
a night away from her father’s cock, each as implausible as
the other. i carry those words to bed with me - not safe,
like nightgowns - hold each word as i decide what to wear.
my safety isn’t a question.
i sleep with dreams of children now, of laughing girls who
can wear any pajama they wish without a father’s intrusion.
i dream, we take inventory of the broken pieces, we wonder
how to sew them together. she says, quietly: maybe i can use
the lace from my nightgown, maybe that will hold.
The Gardener came to the willow tree, autumn fallen upon
Teardrop leaves of rustic amber and bronze, whirlwind swirlin’ foregone
Happenstance hapless romance never bloomed, lonely only once more
Crooked limbs scored trunk bruised and burnt timbers, fright’ning
lightning of war
Branches like skeletons in the billows, ginger lit sky aflame
Reaching out to the glows in the heavens, answers remain unclaimed
I’ve had many seasons change in my life, I recall being a tree,
Rooted down in my own circumstance, yearning more to be free,
Snow laid so heavy binding on my stems, surely I’d break in two,
Without the Gardeners who came to me, to help me start anew,
When you have healed and moved onward once more, you’ll think of
times we share,
And tend the garden of someone else’s soul, with love and upmost care.

Come . . . the taste of fine wine, brewed over time awaits.
It has aged, fermented, known the rites of spring.
Drink . . . Ingest . . . Feel the flavor of its years and Know the beauty of an authentic, full-fledged:
Vintage.
Paige Hector-Arizona State, 1996

Betty

Today, she came to my home needing help with the computer.
My sweetest friend and honorary grandmother to my only son,
Last year Betty moved into a retirement community, and loves it.
Dear friends, now past neighbors, her medical power of attorney.
My heart had broken at the thought of her leaving,
Yet I admired and supported her courage to make that decision.
And, act on it.
We had sorted through more than 80 years of accumulated memories,
collections, emotions.
Today, she said, “There is something else I need help with.”
“Writing checks and balancing my books is just too hard now,”
Macular degeneration and arthritis share almost equal blame.
Tears filled her eyes, her face determined, composure dignified.
We talked of goals and options, and her frustration.
Truly an honor as her friend but also as a social worker.
Sometimes, the two weave beautifully together.

3rd Place Winner

Jessica Greenbaum-New York University, 2014

My Question, Today’s Answer

He read a poem about his uncle and I thought
Good idea, no one can blame you for having an uncle;
Even in a genocide, you might once have had an uncle.
The old poets who didn’t know the news across the world
Dipped a rabbit hair brush in blackest ink and casually
Wrote about the moon’s reflection in the water bucket, or about
A spider. We still read those poems. One rainy afternoon in bed
I finally thought, Maybe it’s okay. Maybe all the ways I have betrayed
The need for action by the act of writing, maybe that’s just one of my
Thousand flaws, and while I am counting them, trying to
Address them, I am still allowed to describe how dawn,
On my birthday, kisses the world like a grandmother
Tilts the crying child’s forehead toward hers, for a kiss.
“They Said, *Stop Running*”

I cringed when I felt  
the sting of two  
missdirected words flesh my back:  
nigger please  

As if my personhood could be excused by  
smelling out a “please” afterward  

The flag sputters a  
  wheezy anthem  
to the United States of the Segregated  

After three hundred years,  
we’re still looking at each other  
down a gun barrel  

Why Social Work

It’s the children that I fight for,  
Too young to stand up on their own,  
Without someone in their corner,  
They may forever to be alone.  

It’s the adults that I fight for,  
Those silenced and hidden in the dark,  
To help remind them of their value,  
And bring them back their spark.  

It is humanity I fight for,  
Because all humans have a heart.  
We’re all connected to each other,  
And that’s the place to start
Shooting at the Grand 16 Movie Theater

Ordinary life
Interrupted by extraordinary event
Of blood, terror and death
Happening to ordinary people
In ordinary town.

These victims and this community,
Ordinary in their fight for survival and safety,
Becoming extraordinary
Through their resourcefulness, love, kindness and
Recognition of God's protective Presence through it all.

Survivors now,
Wary, grateful, connected,
Joyful for second chances.
Still ordinary
Yet forever extraordinary.

The rain drops on the window cry for me tonight.
They heard you had to leave me behind
Said that it was the only way to survive.
I told them that the word "mother" had become synonymous with regret.
And that the bad taste it left in my mouth every time I used it
was from 14 years of dressed up lies and broken truths she fed to me.
I've heard blood is thicker than water.
But you cut your own wrists and let me bleed out onto the cold pavement.
And when the rain came and washed me away, you cried.
Maybe that's why storms these days taste like the ocean,
They are mixed up with too much blood and the tears you cried
The day you gave me away
The Fog

Peering forward with heavy eyes
Our burdens born more heavy still
For signs and portents oft overlooked
We search our gloomy path until
With wistful urge for days bygone
We briefly turn to gaze upon
This forlorn winding path we’ve tread
The fog is lifted, there instead
Lay bare the anguished journey led.

The Road is Hard

The road is hard for those who care
for the broken in a licensed way.
There are the reluctant, ungrateful,
unteachable and hateful,
the backward, awkward, those who say
they’re pleased with disease, won’t compare
how much happier they could be
without their intervention-free
drudgery—hard not to have spoken,

the road is hard for the broken.
As a woman of color, I have always felt subjected to social norms and
gender role expectations.
Granting men access to their freedoms, while prohibiting my
independence.
Do not underestimate my power of potential to own my
adversities: resilience.
My cultural identity is not a deficit, rather a privilege.
I have been ascribed into a specific group of people.
I am bilingual; I speak two equally important languages.
A privilege is exclusive, powerful, and prized.
White privilege offends many it limits a quality of life.
It's unfair and unjust for a group of people to Exemplify, power over others.

Our privileges help or hurt others and we make that decision.
So I ask, Whose privilege?

Mary Ann Getse-Washington University, St. Louis, 1979

Latchkey
lock clicks
backpack thuds
shoes tumble
socks glide
soda fizzes
television buzzes
papers rustle
pencil taps
street light flickers
clock ticks
door creaks
heart jumps
head turns
mother winks
boy sighs
Paradigm

My bleeding blue heart
with the convention of being attached
by a system to the brain.

Case #932

Where did you go just now?
I don’t know. I was having a memory.

Of what?
A little boy. His brother is picking on him.

What does the boy do?
This time. He fights back.

What does the brother do?
Goes to the father.

What does the father do?
He slaps the brother. “Don’t let that little sissy hit you again.”

Are you the little boy?
I can’t remember. It happened to someone.
I don’t remember if it happened to me.
Brittany Elaine Dwyer-George Mason University, 2017

The Storm Catcher

Words dancing in my mind like ballerinas on stage set to perform.
Yes—this is my chance, your eyes are on me.
I will help you brace the eye of the storm.
You look to me for answers in the hopes of being freed
From the prison of your mind.

Yes, I am the one who wields the needle;
Probing for the veins that conceal the unknown.
Determined to see the pages of your sequel
While dissecting your thoughts—leaving no unturned stone.
The pillars that block your path will be redesigned.

My days are spent seeing your strength;
Pouring over solutions to what plagues you and
Recognizing all the while that at the length
Of every day comes a night.
But at the end of every tunnel... light.

Maya Williams-East Carolina University

The Session

She is living with depression,
And all Mother can do
Is speak of Mother's days of adolescence,
Believing the placebo is actual
Medication.
All I can do is listen...
She doesn't have to turn
That smile upward with a rusty
Screwdriver for me.
Twisting harder and harder
Won't make her happy.
Her emotions are not choices,
For her facial ripples are out of her control
She doesn't have to build a mask
For anyone.
Aegean

Moonlight is a mirror broken among the rocks.
Like stone in deep water,
nothing escapes time. Wind written in grass
beyond a copse the color of wet cinnamon.
My mouth is too lonely for words.
What in these dark leaves has not been said?
Even the mountain breaks down. Only the moon
survives the sea.

Social work is more than helping
It is to extend emotional expression,
Connection, into profession
It is to insist that social justice
And equality are within our reach
If we can only untangle all
The systems, history, trauma,
And privilege, which we must face
Eye to eye, and in our clients' shoes
Social work is more than lending a hand,
It is more than helping, to
Commit to empathy, to really believe
That all people have yet to meet
The best version of their lives
The one that they manifest themselves
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.

nine past twelve
is it noon or midnight is it the blue pills or the funny shaped pill
    that fogs the mind not the pain
the tours the sand the heat the bodies
the bodies of buddies of friends of my company officer
the blood the young faces blur the memory
why did I get out alive but now with an leg of metal where bones and skin
once was
does anyone care does anyone have the time
    is it noon or is it midnight
it is nine past twelve
The Ones Without Names

It has been a long time now
since I remembered your names.
They used to live in my hand and my heart
until other names piled on
and yours smeared.
Your faces are vivid
clean lined and still
like wax mannequins.
Our voices exchanged the same air.
Our once living bodies
we had hearts and lungs.
But yours are not here
And mine are not the same

Stages of Grief: “He loves me not.”

He’d kneel beside her in her garden
as she poked holes in the earth
sowing flower seeds
with her hands. Together
they’d watch the flora awaken
and rise;

and he believed, as she did,
that God’s fingers gently tugged
each seedling from its bed
with invisible thread toward Heaven.

But now, full grown -
kneeling in the impressions she left behind
when He gathered her unexpectedly -
he plucks petals from a daisy, one-at-a-time,
questioning Him, and his perennial existence.
My Teachers

Kids teach me more than grown-ups do
Homeless people teach me more than celebrities do
Non-verbal people teach me more than public speakers do
This is why I’m skilled and knowledgeable
This is why I love social work

A Social Worker’s Search for Meaning

Every day I look out into the world to see what I can find.

This day I look into the eyes of a young mother who is struggling to provide.
Every day she hurts and aches.
Pushes and makes every risk she can take.
Yet is able to see beyond the judgmental looks and stares.
And have love for her children without a care.

This day I look into the eyes of an addict who doesn’t know how to stop.
Every day she struggles with a needle.
Her self-hatred and depression caused by the actions of a man.
Yet she pushes on and refuses to be a coward.
And continues to surrender to her higher power.

Every day I look out into the world to see what I can find.
To see if in life there is a purpose of any kind.
In their eyes, in the smile, in their hope -
Educate, protect, support, advocate, love, do not judge... me.
I see my answer.
A clock scattered in red

Tick Tock, for the clock is soon to stop as the man on the edge
Is now on the ledge. 500 pounds of dread embedded deep within

A worn-out mask holds a sufficing smile; Lo and Be-
hold, the man in the mask had a task before dawn.

Tick Tock, the mask passed and the edge slips by, From
five stories high

Abruptly, a passerby meets the man, seemingly from the sky,
Tick Tock and the flood of blood. One last time he meets another’s eye

Denying actuality, the passerby pushes on. Tick Tock,

And a sense of dread brings it all back: Unprepared,

As dreams bring floodgates of gargling blood and
Flashbacks of the rattling battle between life and death

Anger ignites and everlasting remorse inflames. The
Weakness consumes. Hope dissipates. Lost in guilt, I
Hold tightly the clock, ashamed it’s scattered in red.

Hospice Wisteria

Many on the journey but each at various junctures
Some in denial, few reached acceptance, many stalled at anger
Wandering from doctor to doctor several hope for different news
All headed for the same destination
Several rely on faith, a few non-believers and many angry with their god
Families on one accord, families that feud
Some die penniless, some leave millions
Daughters and sons come out of the woodwork
Some disappear into the night
Which funerals will I attend?
Joy, sadness, hope, disappointment, inspiration, grief, a myriad of
emotions
Grateful He has chosen this as my life’s work
I smile as I navigate through my destiny
I am a Hospice Social Worker
Day 3 has passed and my wrists are healing,
My moods are exhausted, tired of feeling.

My heart burns, yearns to be accepted
I should be better in a week, that’s what’s expected

My mind grows old, tired of the fight
But hope is the goal, I must not lose sight

Here I am the safest, that I know is true
I told my school I was in the hospital, sick from the flu.

You see people don’t understand I’m not trying to be depressed,
That Bipolar people are “crazy” and I’m tired of being oppressed.

Or that I’m sick or a psycho or a sick psycho bitch
I’m trying to patch up my wounds in one little stitch.

I can make them understand, there has to be a way
I’m sure if they had a mental illness, they would have a lot less to say.

Beings in the World

Beings in the world,
standing firm and on the ground,
laughing, loving, creating.

It is the “received” creation that comes through the hand, the mouth...
the dance, the sculpture.
We do not “make” it, but we feel it.

We are beings in the world,
united, together, celebrating, mourning, transforming,
creating from memories and creating/expressing memories.

We bear witness,
we are witnesses,
we find our path,
together we create.
**Hereditary Humanity**

She was a mountain; the fairy tale truth of a youth-filled fountain.

She was gorgeous; the definition of humility in vital importance.

She was a body of water at peace,
She calmed the waves and threw the lifeboats out to sea.
She was for me.
She was for anyone else with the capacity to bleed.

She was a warrior disguised as civilian.
A textbook on humanity, she was enviously brilliant.

She was a sun that never set;
The epitome of loyalty, a perpetually safe bet.

She was simultaneously growing old and brand new;
Her hands soft as stone to hold and pull you through.

She is part of me more than these words could construe.
She is me, in my veins, where our shared blood runs blue.

---

**Emanation**

Angry eyes of hunger
Circling my bed
Lie in wait to feast upon
The contents of my head
My happiness their nemesis
No longer are they frail
Like fattened lambs at Hanukkah
My joy their steak and ale
I'd rather give them memories
Or hopes of what could be
Instead they feed on progress
Emanating me
I send a 'speak to text' message about Fred Rogers
With the hashtag: PROPHET
My iPhone hears: PROFIT
Daily, this dissonance dances into my life;
A beautiful homeless teenage mother
Doggedly working to learn/earn/parent
Beyond this, she performs poetry like Maya
And croons songs to her daughter like Beyonce
She aces another math test,
While dreaming of a career in medicine
Mostly I am struck mostly by how she listens to others:
As if they are the whole world.
To them, she is stealing their profit,
To me, she is a prophet.
I will follow.

Amanda Symmes-Boston University, 2014

Callie Thomas-University of South Carolina, 2016

Bartleby's Ghazal

A thin teenager asked to eat more if she would prefer to
But she shakes her head with a preference not to.
Begged by the homeless, "spare some change"
darting eyes respond, I would prefer not to
Grant them the gift of legalized love
your judgment says, you would prefer not to
Create jobs and let them work for a living
recant and say you know they prefer not to
The girl proposes taking a black guy to the prom
a mama says, "Dear I would prefer you not to."
Do you know the 'they' you speak for?
No—because today you would prefer not to.
The wise age says, one day you will understand.
But I really prefer not to.
Marginalized

My voice, lost in the wind,
Screaming, to be heard,
Whispering, to be felt,
Silent, to not be crushed,
Held, to not be judged.
My voice, lost even to me.

A Distance Thank You

My troubles started leading me to dark roads paven.
I had no hope, no love, no family, no safe haven.
Burdened soul led deeper into the jungle, starved of dignity.
Centered in the middle, eyes upon me devoid of humanity.
My hands reached out for warmth, shelter from the elements.
My hands slapped, while faces turned in disgusts, minds in settlement.
Knowledge that there is fewer ways to be any lower.
Shoulders slumped carelessly, moving forward, just slower.
My slow pace is stopped by another’s out reached hand.
Directing me towards a path I didn't know was in this land.
Distrust at first, never trust a kind smile I had learned.
Trust not kind words, in my heart lesson burned.
Actions prove good intentions, leading to clean body, clean clothes.
Belly full, head raised, my eyes in the direction the wind blew.
Tears escape as I whisper Thank You
Dear Mom  (A poetic interpretation of a letter written by an emotionally abandoned child living in a residential group care facility)

Roses are red. Violets are blue.
I'm really homesick. Do you miss me too?

This place is okay. I like the food.
They say we’ll go bowling if we can be good.
Some kids act out, some were abused,
Some were neglected. We all are confused.

"It isn’t your fault,” the therapist said,
But I want to say “sorry” for all that I did.
It must have been awful—I’m not really clear—
Something so bad that I ended up here.

I was twenty points short for a few days at home,
But I had more than enough for a visit by phone.
I waited and waited the whole weekend through—
And when nobody called me, I knew it was you.

[Signed] Me

Susan Boykin-University of South Carolina, 1981

The Dance of America

In America, we have many dancers
All are from different circumstances
Everyone is invited to the dance
It all looks so equal, at first glance

Some dancers are old, some are young, and some are not able to join in the fun
Some sit by themselves, afraid to join in
Others are full of chagrin

Many are not properly dressed
Dresses are soiled, pants are not pressed

No one told them it was black tie
And the proper clothes they should buy

The invitation says “All will be treated with equality”
But sadly this is not so
Not everyone gets a chance
To show up for the dance
On Being a New Therapist

10:00
My first client begins speaking, problems unfolding from a place
Tightly wound within, trying to find a way out of the maze.

10:15
I feel nervous. I counter with Relax! Don't get in their way.
The answers are within them.
My client continues - pain, but I sense their resilience.
Confusion, but I can see a path beginning to come into view.
My inner alarm bells ring, fix it, fix it,
But- I won't fix it. I can't fix it.
I will walk beside them, session to session, I will hold the pain.

10:35
My client stops speaking, looking expectant. I say a little.
The feelings in the room mellow into a calm optimism.

Looking in the Mirror

"You don't know what it's like."
I've heard a few times, but what you don't know is that
I've spit the same lines, I've sat in that chair
with your whole world tearing apart
and your heart wrapped in despair.

The things you share, they still ring bells
to when I was your age cursing the world to high hell.
I want you to succeed in everything you do.
I didn't just study social work,
I lived it too.

You just want someone to believe
because all your life you heard you can't.
I stand here today as living, breathing proof
and as a former foster youth,
I'm telling you, whatever it is, you can.
Jerry Judge
Washington University, St. Louis, 1977

Social Worker

Sponging up people's pain all day.
Each story adding weight to the burden
she struggled not to carry home
to her spouse, to her bed, to her dreams.

One day to lighten the burden she didn't
sponge up pain and didn't listen,
not really listen, to the stories.
Soon her burden and her values were gone.

Erica Davis
Hood College, 2016

I Know

I know what it's like to feel sick
I know what it's like to be poor
You feel like every hope is behind a slammed door
I know what it's like to be ill
I know what it's like to try to stand tall
You may feel like you're hitting a wall,
But in the end you will see
That life is what you want to make it to be
With help from resources around you
You can get all that you need
Don't give up until you succeed
You have the determination and help all around you
You can make it; I know this to be true
Because I was once you
Homeless / Human

The dishwasher needs to be unloaded
Laundry that never ends, dogs need to be fed
Groceries need to be bought, the house needs to be cleaned
The car needs gas, there is not enough time in the day.
Luxury problems. Because others ask
Where will I sleep tonight? Will I be beaten up?
Will all my worldly processions be stolen tonight if I sleep?
Where will my next meal come from? Where can I take a shower?
How many times will I be told I’m lazy today?
How many times will I be looked at with scorn?
My problems are real.
And yet I can see beauty in the sunshine yellow of a dandelion
Can you?
Or are you too wrapped up in your luxurious problems?
Those problems that cause you to see me as something less than human.

Ana L.

He made her strip, remove everything,
to inspect her flesh, root to tip.
Pore over every pore expecting evidence of other men.
The last time he grabbed her by the neck, she dropped her mistake of showing fear.
Instead she grabbed him right back and clenched,
through her teeth, “I can squeeze just as hard,” & he let go.
She admitted to the relief when he hung himself.
When she goes out for laundry, a star twinkles.
It is laughing into her eyes. She is comforted, then cries.
His gift was magic, a disappearance.
She doesn’t wake up to his pacing with a knife.
The fingerprints around her neck are unpeeling, swirl by swirl.
After all the booze, she muses,
maybe he just fell asleep in that noose.
Rich H. Kenney, Jr-University of Texas, Austin, 1984

When the textbook guidelines fall short and Mrs. Lopez who is dying at home does not respond to warm smiles or active listening eyes, you could leave—
or you could ask about the picture on the wall, the woman in pirouette poetry, the elegant ballerina.
When Mr. Krakowski tells you he doesn't have anything else to say, you could leave—
or you could savor his craft of intricacy, the exquisitely carved wood of the wine rack he stares at in awe as if seeing it for the first time.
When Dr. O., the botanist, tells you not today, that she'd rather rest her eyes, you could leave—
or you could describe her garden’s purple majesty, its royal scent, its noble medicine.

Kasey Craig-Colorado State University, 2018

Whisper

To hear hope is to find a whisper in a crowd.
Years of suffering, despair and doom
Because the whisper never learned to scream.
And so it became lost,
In the mess of the scene.

But with one whirl, swirl
The whisper finds its way to be heard.
By a single mind with a passion to guide.

The whisper enters, prays.
A response is formed.
And with three simple words
The whisper learns,
Help is here.
A Humble Hero

To hold the hand of a child
Pure, innocent, helpless
My passion is this

To enlighten, to nurture
Guide and learn
To fill blossoming minds
With the wisdom they yearn

A scholar, a mother, a success
She will be
If adversity does not embrace her
Before me

Appreciate, advocate
Engage and empathize
Social workers
Humble heroes in disguise

Erica Veno-Lewis University, 2016

Daniel Leff-Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 2017

Here.

I went to read to my dear client, the Blind Lady, 93 years, her age.
She asked, “Where is the book you’ll read to me today?”
I responded, “Here.”
“‘Here’ means nothing to the Blind. Know well
That such words are the hallmark of the Sighted.”
I apologized.
“If you would make amends, cover your eyes and know the world
As a Blind Person.”
I walked across the room from her and covered my eyes.
With anxious heart and faltering step,
I walked forward fearfully, Blindly, to try and meet her.
I begged her to talk ... and tell me where she was.
And in the newfound depths of my terrified Blind state I heard her answer:
“Here.”
**Deborah Port-The University of Iowa, 1980**

**Unconditional Love**

The only reason it's taking me
so long to get over you,
is because I love you.
So, naturally, I tend to
give more, freely, unconditionally..
Even though, at times, I think
you wished I didn't love you,
I pause to remember
how you tasted, what you said.

It isn't just these memories
that keep my attention,
but the fact that I love you,
and whether or not you
love me, too, isn't so important,

Because I have experienced that
special ability of loving someone
without requiring anything back.

---

**Stefany R. Wolfe-University of Maryland Baltimore County-Shady Grove, 2017**

**One by One**

As the waters remain unsettled,
The sky so ominously entombs the Earth from above.
Containment, as the fierce wind screams through the air,
Threatening the weak.
Subsiding is the peacefulness;
At least for a time.
Relief in the knowledge of its undoubted relentless return,
As familiarity breeds contentment
Such is the two-sided personality of nature;
Comparable to that of person.
As the powerful wind whips through my hair- it becomes me.
As it tries to knock me down with its mighty blow-it becomes me.
As the rain pelts my face robbing me of sight-it becomes me.
As the electricity in the air tries to strike-it becomes me.
I stand in the open accepting the challenge before me.
Continuous

A year has passed; what have I learned
Placating comfort from those who don't know: time heals no wound
Cunning, he sneaks into your life - gradually then suddenly
pain is masked ounce by ounce
distraction numbs
He hands a jar open to possibilities - immense, seemingly not fill-able.

One minuscule, painful grain of sand enters
another follows. Two memories past now
sand, accelerated, fills the jar with its weight
This is life: no good or bad, no right or wrong
only decisions and consequences
rewards to bear, burdens to bear
Sand will fall. Memories linger heavy, not meaningless
Painful and content
Continuous

Elizabeth Wolfson-New York University, 1995

The Cliff of Unknowing

I have spent a lifetime teaching
what I have only now learned;
this Earth is no more steady than the last earthquake,
all loves die with us or without us
and nothing but mystery and surprise
reside within the slippery search for satisfaction.

At the cliff of unknowing, I know
the stubborn companionship
of regret and self-flagellation
is neither real friend nor worthy enemy;
what is still to be done and undone,
is no further than precisely where I stand;
at the edge of vacancy, center of a dream.
They walk by every day
Tourists with cameras and sunglasses
Flashing as they hurry after their guide.
On Sundays the church at the end
Of the block inhales and exhales
Noble, faithful people.
Kids hold tightly to their parents
Looking at the sky high buildings around them
While couples leave the restaurant across
The street after a fun day out
For a good night in.
They don’t see me
Sitting here under
Newspapers and a torn coat.
Only the reflection in passing car windows
Looks me in the eye.

In the Wood
In the street I stand
With a smile made of stained glass
Beautiful, but ever so fragile
Composed of broken pieces of the past
Here, I reach my hand out to the ones
I can touch, the ones I can help
I move past others with hidden sadness
But here in the wood
Among the restless trees
The fortress falls and
I shed the tears
That shatter my soul.
Sideways

I was young when the world ended
Walking sideways since I landed
Now tracing footsteps up walls projected
With my unmistaken new perspective
I kept reaching out for a missing hand
As crumbling walls left no place to stand
Then fingertips as from entity or apparition
Grabbed and pulled me from my position
No palm of God, although perhaps sent
Recovered me from my decent
But yet another human being
Reacting to the pain they’ve seen
Returned me upright to the ground
A helping hand, small but profound

To Live an Adventure

Adventure is the heart-dropping scene at the top of a mountain
The moving rhythms of a symphony
The resonance of the waves on an empty cave
Adventure is the freedom found in the stillness of a sunset
But, adventure is not only a physical experience
Adventure is listening to the heart of your neighbor
Adventure is serving the cry of a desperate heart
Adventure is being a voice to the mute
Adventure is finding yourself in the service of others
I want my life to be woven in the depths of adventure
**Tiffany Adamson-University of Oklahoma, 2008**

**The Hope Haiku**

Hope chased me down,  
Hope seduced me from death’s door,  
Hope has a sweet voice.

---

**Eva Forde-Columbia University, 2001**

**Ode to the Code**

A song for you, my faithful friend,  
For your simple beauty to the end.  
Dilemmas rise, but you stay strong;  
The noblest outcome is your song.  
And even those that think you trite,  
Must look to you for wrong and right.  
Your legacy of truth secure  
Will ever guide my path, I'm sure.  
I'm grateful for you keep me safe  
In times when situations chafe.  
Though sometimes you're misunderstood  
I rest and know your aim is good.  
I love you, Code of Ethics!
**Kevin Moreau-Florida Atlantic University, 2014**

**Life Lessons:**

The life that I live, the life that I love
The air that I breathe, the sky up above;
To be who I am was God-given
For me not to appreciate that, is not living.
My blessings have been significantly profound
Compelling me to observe and turn around.
The past, it looks so far away
And yet here I am today;
A sense of peace is what I long for,
A sense of peace is what I strive for.
Experiences, experiences give me strength

**Brooke Andregic-University of South Carolina, 2016**

**Therapeutic Math**

Walking through my door
you might feel <
talking with me
hopefully you feel –
walking out my door
you could feel >
The social worker

Social work is *laboring* without definitive hours from sun up to sundown
Helping, healing, and habilitating;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *engaging* the victim, the survivor, and the offender;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *demonstrating* sympathy, empathy, and compassion;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *educating*, *counseling*, and *advocating* on a micro and macro level;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *supporting* those in crisis using various evidenced based interventions;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *applying* professional ethics, public policies, and budgets concurrently;
But a social worker is ME.

Social work is *lobbying* for protected rights and equality for all;
But a social worker is ME at your service.

Awake

they call it “progress”
tongues tied - gentrified - this neighborhood, once home
to houseless, to artists, to the workers who work
three jobs to get by, as they build,
build
build
another condo, priced out of reach
another store, where only tourists will shop
like sheep, on the green pastures of capitalism
fed by the springs of water that comes in plastic bottles
an island landscape that has been raped more times than she can count
an infrastructure that fucks her into feigned submission
they do not know that their sleeping beauty
has started to stir
awake
Why Should We Care?

In a world where terror rears its head
Holding hostage individuals, families, communities
In a world where pictures portray a façade,
Hiding the truth of hurts, pains, mounds of hopelessness
Individuality is no longer valued beyond the hysteria of
Clothing, body type, income status
Why should we care?
Caring, the Social Worker’s choice, igniting restoration...
We choose to lay aside our personal hostage situations
Freeing those who are mentally, socially captive...wedged
We choose to stand toe to toe with facades...screaming lies
Helping others identify true self; becoming alive
We choose to see beyond clothing, body type, & income status
Reaching the heart of those who desire to breathe- again
We Care. We should. Will you?

Seasoned

Spring is the goldfinch’s mantle. Silver Maple samaras drop in helical
Resignation to the banks of the Iowa. Bloodroot, thistle.
Never knowing walking, [S] sped his wheelchair into the thunder.
In the humidity, he laughed in arcs of mud. I glistened naïveté.

Summer is the coyote’s yelps. Cottonwood seeds float in futile
Divination, currents of the Trinity. Hemlock, Queen Anne’s Lace.
Blind and deaf since birth, [J] unbolted furniture with teeth and fingers.
In death, he aspirated enteral feedings. I bargained bitter equilibrium.

Fall is the monarch’s wings. Bur Oak leaves bleed black boned
Ossification high above the Mississippi. Milkweed, barbed wire.
[C] was 34 and her husband beat her into the colors of a forest floor.
Kids buried pop cans in the couch like seeds. I sat in my car and wept.

Winter is the crow’s beak. Empty Iowa fields echo January’s
Supplication, we wander under an ablution of falling frozen stars,
We wonder about prayer, we witness words and water.
Robert Ricks-Chadron State College, 2017

Needing Some Help

Sad with a phony smile
Tough with fake posture
Going through life
With no promise of tomorrow

Wondering if they notice
Wondering if they care
Would life be better
If I wasn’t there?

Is there anyone out there
A person that can help
‘Cause living like this
Is hard by myself

Terrie Normand DuCote-Louisiana State University, 2003

Walls

I build walls that protect, walls that shield,
walls that say I shall not yield
Or reveal who I am or how I feel.

I build walls that hide,
Walls that cover what’s inside,
walls that stare, smile or look away
walls that even block my eyes from the tears I might have cried.

I build walls that never let me truly touch those I love so very much.

Walls that need to fall!

Walls meant to be a fortress,
Are only prisons after all
To see with detachment,
Is to be able to change,
Letting go gently.

Craig Mosher-The University of Iowa, 2000

If a Tree Falls

A heart breaks in a crowd.
No branches; no sawdust,
But one afternoon a social worker
Hears the crashing sound.

The sound of heartbreak shared
Bends our ears and like a prism
The images transform into

A tree falls in a forest.
A heart breaks in a crowd.
To hear it makes it real.
To listen helps it heal.

Diane M. Wright-University of Kentucky, 1997
Let it Breathe, Let it Be

It's freeing, it's confining
It connects, it divides
It's calming, it's maddening
It's still, it's on edge
It tires, it relaxes
It dims, it glows
It's numbing, it's renewing
It bewilders, it illuminates
It's dull, it's sacred

It’s inevitable

Silence in the group:
It’s a spiritual thing

Let it breathe,
Let it be

MOTHER.me

I don’t know what to say to MOTHER.
You will learn. There is not a golden dialogue for life.
Be patient in tone.
WORDS have escaped her.
Evermore guide her with yours.

Please give me a solution.
With patience and education, it will become easier. Never easy.

MOTHER is not herself.
You are right. The disease does this.
The outside. Does not match the inside.
Find the beauty within. It is still and always will be there.

New chapter in her life. Same narrator.
Where do I fit in? Same character.
Different voice.
**Crooked World**

I spotted a crooked world when I was just a little girl,
when all I could see was in front of me.
Idle hands reaped so much reward
as they stole from the blistered palms of the poor on the factory floor.
Mothers cried as babies died,
and others sighed and told their lies
of the land of the free and equality,
and blamed it all on the economy.
No, we are all responsible.
Every time we pull in when we should be reaching out.
Every time we stay quiet when we should be shouting, shouting it out.
When we turn our heads our hands turn red.
There are so many around us, there are so many around us.
Every day a war is waged. The name changes but the story stays the same.
There are so many around us. There are so many around us.

**Process**

Door opens, they walk in screaming, too calm, crying.
I am quiet.
Mouths open, they are grieving, hurting, lost.
I am quiet.
They want answers to questions that are impossible.
I ask questions they didn’t know they needed answered.
Weeks go by. Walk in, listen, rinse, and repeat.
They begin to find and answer the questions themselves.
I am quiet.
Tears and fears turn to power and control.
Unresolved pain gives and the world is safe again.
They say they don’t know how to live without you.
“You are the one who has done everything” I remind them,
“I have just sat here quietly.”
They are quiet.
Tears of frustration, and headaches of grief.
They don't see what I see, they don't understand.
I'm trying to help, but they won't let me in.
They are angry and sad. This “new normal” isn’t right.
I've seen this sad face before. I can help them.
But they have to trust me.
Hours of work, tears of frustration.
Headaches of grief.
This time from me.
I'm doing my best.
But I can’t change the past for you.
I can’t take away the pain.
But I can listen. I can love.
I can let you find your “new normal” in your own time.
I'm here still. I'll cry with you. And love with you.

Glory to the social worker

Using the song "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by William Steffe

I'm a social worker for the county of LA
I have a thousand clients who must be seen today
I do all this work here for a tiny bit of pay
But my work is living on

Glory, Glory Social Worker, glory, glory Social Worker
Glory, Glory Social Worker, for our work is living on

I work inside a building where some bad boys reside
But once they are paroled there, it fills me up with pride
I then learn that one of them has now become a bride
For my work is living on

Glory, Glory Social Worker, glory, glory Social Worker
Glory, Glory Social Worker, for our work is living on