The University of Iowa
School of Social Work

National Poetry Contest
for
Social Workers

2017 Fifth Edition
clas.uiowa.edu/socialwork
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About The University of Iowa and the School of Social Work

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 our website http://clas.uiowa.edu/socialwork

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 nineteen-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, 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 jeffi-palermo@uiowa.edu.

For those interested in participating in the 2017-18 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

The judges for the 2017 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;

- **Megan M W Henry** I have worked in the University Writing Center for three years, and have worked as a writing Fellow for four years. I have published 2 pieces, translated a book from German for a business that was hoping to expand their audience internationally, and worked as professionally as an anonymous reviewer of Science Lab reports. Also both of my parents are social workers!

- **Rossina Zamora Liu, MFA, PhD**, Clinical Assistant Professor, Language, Literacy, and Culture Program, Director, The College of Education Writing Resource, Faculty Fellow, The Provost’s Office of Outreach and Engagement;

- **Nicole Balin**, Nicole Balin is a second year poetry MFA candidate at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. She was selected as a 2015 finalist for the Mississippi Review prize and is a recent recipient of a James Merrill Poetry Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center;

- **Vicki L. Osland, LISW, CADC**, Vicki is a social worker at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in the Employee Assistance Program. She is also a substance abuse counselor and therapist with UIHC Chemical Dependency Services. Certified as a poetry therapist, Vicki utilizes creative approaches with those who are interested in using writing and reading as a way to cope and gain greater insight into themselves.
1st Place Winner

Leslie Olson, University of Iowa, (2018)

Beginning English

Yes. After is sometimes always.
When you must hold your pen
Different than the other students
Your thumb, like your child, cut from your hand in Bujumbura;
When you understand nothing of others’
Lips gnawing air silent since the mortars;
When fifteen months of nightmares chisel
Out of Mai Edaga prison and escape into your summer windows
Taking you captive again, obscuring the teacher’s lesson.
After is always then. Still. Come. Learn.
We will have moments when tense slips,
When we lose ourselves in conjugation: I am. You are. She is. We are.
Here we learn to write in the past, yes
but this book of blank pages is yours to keep, yet to be
filled. Together we will learn the future perfect.
2nd Place Winner

Rebecca Thieman, Virginia Commonwealth University, (2018)

Meteorology of the Body

It will look like a sunrise – the purple, yellow and blue blending into daybreak on the landscape of your olive skin. Beneath the dawn your ribcage frame has fissures in the exoskeleton surrounding your vital organs – gaps in the wall meant to protect you.

The first time we met you drew a storm, pointed to the hurricane’s eye and said, “That’s me.” As if you stood still when the sky turned black, as if you weren’t enveloped by the rain, as if the wind didn’t knock you off your feet with a blow of its fist. I didn’t tell you about the eyewall – how the center of a hurricane lies within the most destructive winds.

I know how much fog lives in your house. How he blends into the walls, the man who turned your skin into a sunrise. Tell me everything you know of hiding. Tell me what happens when the fog clears and the storm rolls in. Tell me how it feels to breathe – your pinkish grey lungs straining against cracked bones as each breath, each sigh, each shuddering inhale reminds you of your skin’s breaking dawn.
3rd Place Winner

*Christopher Joseph, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 2008*

**Before and After**

“Standing at the kitchen sink scrubbing bacon grease from a frying pan staring into the yard as my children play is when I’m told my husband’s dead. I squeeze my eyes shut – capturing the moment – and I never stop scrubbing.”

She and I revisit this junction regularly, her hands in mine, the skin on hers like sandpaper. Each time we approach the sink, she resists, but she’s drawn to it, immobilized by its gravity.

I tell her, she cannot heal as long as she’s suspended on the precipice of Before and After.

“Standing here, I feel safest,” she says.

I explore this, what she believes she needs protection from.

“Letting go,” she says blankly, closing her eyes.
Richard

Kinder than I'd ever be with an upbringing like that
His demeanor soft, like his body, his mind sharp, like his attitude
Saw blood in bathtubs and violence at home
Had a mother who couldn't help herself and didn't help him.

Found an opportunity, anyway. Somehow.
Had a chance to start again. Anew. If that is even a thing.
Found patience in people. Began using his voice.
However, poor health and poor people held him back prematurely.

His mind beautiful and sweet with a penchant for cloudy skies
His thoughts difficult and depressed with a feeling of forever

He started slipping. Started seething.
What is the point, anyhow?

Why was he so nice, despite all he'd been through, he'd ask me.
I didn't know.
Doksa Akte Waunque  (Lakota Sioux "until we meet again in the next life")

Westward Winds grew and blew messages from Grandfather Sky
carried East was a specially named gift Lil' Bou for my Caribou
calling upon Ancestors of all four directions to hold our Joy bundled snuggled
tight
as we can't embrace in this life hopeful someday we all will reunite
Mother Earth we offer cornmeal, sage, and candle light; I remove my longest
locks
pressed inside a smudged prayer box grant us our mournful right
safeguard our deceased womb-bound only lives, internalized brimming
strongest brewed bitter resentment tinctured; tensile strength discontent
give them back are our desired warmest wishes wrestling withering dashed
insistent!
dreams undone; clouding over the shine of the sun flooding eyes have
drowned our hopes
grant us grandest of canyon space to grieve replace this soaring pain with
reprieve
may our tiniest lives not ever be forgot; sadness burdens bewilders our once
elated hearts
we entrust you Master within earthly Angels guide us distraught to our next
miraculous lot
First Name Basis

We need you to be Doctors
Shove it in their face
The fight of years
Against the man
That part
we all -We understand
The audacity of social work
This fight for space and time
Let us hear your battle cry
Remind us that we can
Your name it has no value, girl
Your research it ain’t science, girl
Your voice it’s just too loud, girl
You’ll never be more now, girl
We need you to be Doctors
Trauma

Trauma,
a word lost in an avalanche of symbols without a sound.
For those who experience it, this word has a profound meaning.
It means that the steady ground they walk in is no longer safe.
They have experienced the vile penetration of inhumanity.
The experience left them with a sound of agony
constantly ringing a tone that pierces the soul

Trauma, generalized to all parts of life,
desecrates what once was sacred and tranquil.
The horror of sensing metamorphic spirits engulfs the entire being
relentlessly.

Such is trauma to those who experienced it.
It is not a word; it is a symbol
of monstrous automatic rumination.
My Vagina Is Not the Coolest Part About Me

What is it with guys these days?
Why am I just a pretty face, a nice rack, and a fat ass?
Condensed down into something that is second class?
Condensed down into a bitch,
a single word that seems to describe an entire female nation.
If I am a bitch, then I am a fucking wolf
and I’m going to howl to the moon and back
until my body is beautiful instead of fuckable.
until my mind matters more than the size of my breast, thigh, and hips.
until all that I am matters more than all that I am not.
until the texture of my being matters more than the texture of my hair.
until the color of imagination outshines the color of my naked skin.
until my hard worked is no longer valued at 80 cents to the dollar but the whole damn dollar.
Till my vagina is not the coolest part about me.
Reemergence

With the passage of time, I continually dipped pieces of myself into a sloshy top of glue,
Then stuck them to your being.
The glue hardened and the candle began to dim.
The pain you endured as I pulled the pieces off is one I hope to pass quickly.
However, the time it takes to sew myself back together has been ruthless,
As I am the only one who is left standing here in the dark
With a flimsy plastic needle.
Rainbow

Red:
the color of heart, danger, desire, fire;
Orange:
the color of citrus, sunset, warmth, fall;
Yellow:
the color of hope, happiness, sun, cowardice;
Green:
the color of freshness, balance, nature, envy;
Blue:
the color of freezing, ocean, serenity, sky;
Purple:
the color of mystery, arrogance, luxury, royalty;
Pink:
the color of gentleness, romance, flowers, femininity;
There is no black and white in a rainbow.
The Addiction

Through every addiction and every affliction
Life has taken on many descriptions
Filled with thoughts of revenge and redemption
Kept moving forward despite the deception
Took every turn, fought through every drop of pain
Trying to run would of just been insane
It would mean all the sacrifices were made in vain
Eventually the storm had to run out of rain
Moving forward but never forgetting the past
Twenty four years how did I last?
Remember wishing the end would come fast
Instead of having to deal with life’s wrath
Now times are not so rough
Thankful that I never gave up
Despite how many times I had had enough
Global Social Work

One world, one species.
One mass, divided;
Locked in constant competition.
Social survival, social segregation,
A need for social success.

Work—an integral part of self-esteem.
Social work—an integral part of social esteem.
Unity of human life,
Unity of community,
To end the cycles that oppress.

One world, one species.
One culture, re-intertwined.
Hands helping humanity,
Hearts healing harm and hatred;
So we might all socially progress.
The beast inside this unsettled earth spews
Pain to bear alone, too much, too many
Thirty-five versions each week fallen
Perhaps thrown
From the weakest limb
Surviving the tumble, bruised and raw
Asking the heavens for salve to heal
The wounds to stop
The bleeding to dry
The tears flow from rivers to lakes
Sometimes the best we can do
Is build a boat together. I watch you drift
With the current
Until the sunrise brings the doves’ sweet morning songs
And you find the courage, again, to rise, to moor in a new land

Sharon Miller, SUNY Albany, 2016
A Social Worker Will Always Stay

Weary, drained, anticipating the day ahead. 
She walks through the door trying to remember what was said. 
The air echoes of the sick mother who begs in need. 
Desperate for her children whom she can no longer feed. 
The cries from the survivor trying to be move on. 
The tremble in her voice and her actions withdrawn. 
The addict who stands defeated with tracks in his arm. 
Resistant against treatment as he disregards his own harm.

A note sat on her desk addressed from a name she once knew. 
She recalls this name as client she helped through. 
It begins with a thank you and proceeds into words of hope. 
How the client has found her path and established ways to cope. 
A feeling of warmth and happiness take over the grey. 
For she knows, in these moments, she will always be here to stay.
Self Care

I’m here to help.
That’s my opening line.
What can I do for you? What have you not been able to do for yourself?
I’m here to help.
I want to make things better for you. I want to fix what cannot be fixed.
I want to right things in your life since I cannot right things in mine.
I’m here to help.
You are the expert yet you look to me as though I have answers.
My answer is…I don’t know. I came to learn.
I’m here to help.
But things are crashing and I barely had the wherewithal to make it here day.
How can I help you when I can’t even help myself?
I’m here to help.
But I don’t know how to help.
I’m here for help.
A Social Worker’s Poem

Chaotic, Melodic, meaningful lows and highs
We are the helping hand, the rescuers, the super heroes in disguise.
Through the hustle and bustle, the sleepless nights
The crying children and parental fights.
In cities and suburbs, we want justice and peace.
We hope to help those who must find their niche.
We work for the “other”, the hopeless and meek.
We help give a voice to those told not to speak.
We find light in the darkness, we help to break through.
May not have all the answers, but don’t give up ‘till we do.
We work for the families, to feel safe in their home.
We work to make sure you don’t feel alone.
We aren’t here for us; we’re just here for you.
We are Social Workers, we know what to do.
Deep Space

Can you meet me somewhere between fate and eternity?
Deep in space where subzero temperatures make sure we can’t move
We can have dinner somewhere along the black hole
Getting sucked into infinity and maybe beyond
Forget our curfews that we will never make
All the time in the world to decide if we are the best mates
How about a ride on shooting star?
We glade past home a million miles an hour
We get to see the world from a different point of view
No need to make me that promise any more
This love can become brand new
What do you think about this date?
Just you and me lost in space
My Weeping PTSD

The complicated story
Always a part of me
It won’t back down
My heart is a dark melody

It vibrates in my bones
It screams inside me
So much time has passed
Emotionally hungover, constantly harassed

my weeping PTSD, my weeping PTSD
People are scared
Around me they don’t know how to be
If only they knew
But I no longer want to be me

My weeping PTSD, my weeping PTSD
With Whom to Walk

You look to the stars for answers and guidance
Relief from the world around you
You submerge yourself in weightlessness
Drifting upwards towards the heavens the waves crash upon your feet
The sand fills in between your toes and the moon glows down upon your face
You lose yourself in euphoria
Greatness encircles you…the world stops

I always wonder where life is headed and with whom I will grow old with?
Who is going to truly love me and accept me?
Who is going to make my travels easier?
Who will let me love them the only way I know how?

As I lay myself upon your feet, I ask you for your heart
All I want is for you to cradle mine.
Hold it and love it
The thought of you never leaves my mind…yet I am so alone
IF You Really Want to Help Me

If you really want to help me, take it slow... feel my words, and Understand the world I know. Be there for me in the bad times, and The good...help me do the things I dream of... not what you think I Should.

And if you really want to help me show you care. In your eyes... I’ll see If you’re really there. Take the time to discover what sets me apart. Know me with your head; and with your heart.

For the road I’ve traveled has been rough. And I struggle in my mind Each passing day. And I pray my strength will be enough; to keep me Going on my way.

If you really want to help me take my hand. Walk with me, as I find joy Within the strife...seek less to explain than to understand; and Know that you will truly touch my life.
Reflection of Confinement

Feathers of beautiful shades swathe the frame of the lone soul
Once she flew devoid of restraint, soaring through the skies
As life’s frustrations transpired she was captured
By the lure of indolence, desiring not having to forage for herself
Becoming ensnared, confined by the advised fortune
Attracted to the polished cage...
Unhurriedly the barred enclosure developed into a begrimed space
Polluted by unconstructiveness, revulsion, and reprimand
Her feathers dulled and she became ill contented
Resolve for freedom being restored
She dreamt and deliberated her course
Anticipating the moment that the gates would open
A sufficient amount of time to writhe free
Remuneration of study establishing autonomy
Birthing a resounding expression of resonance
Allies for Change

To see the strength of humanity spinning
Humanity spiraling on the tip of its last try to get by
Yearning for change
Hoping the direction of the winds will blow it towards peace

To hear the breath of the quiet child sleeping
The innocent voice longing for a reflection in empathetic response
Yearning for change
Hoping the passage into this life will be a good one

To feel the emotion of another
Emotion which can cripple or empower life’s complex journey
Yearning for change
Hoping the broken spirit within will rebound with grace

We are allies
We walk the path with others
We see, we hear, we feel
Social Work

Have you ever been depressed?
Have you ever been a victim of domestic violence?
Have you ever been oppressed?
Have you ever been ridiculed for the way you look or how you dress?
Have you ever been suffering so badly inside that your smile hides your distress?
Have you ever been judged by the color of your skin?
Has anyone told you that you can’t ever win?
Have you ever been so poor that no one cares where you’ve been?
Have you ever been so lost that you can’t find the strength within?
Have you ever been so broken that you found comfort through the use of alcohol and drugs?
Have you ever been so lonely that your own family can’t even show you love?
Let us listen to your thoughts, your feelings and your pleas.
We have a calling to help those whose been down on their knees.
We aren’t here for the money. We are here because this is our calling.
We are social workers. We want to help the falling.
Critical Reflections on Social Work Practice

“Keep the change.” That’s the new vogue.
“Don’t feed the animals is a more honest description.
Give your money to us, not them.
We are social workers; we know what’s best.
They are just the homeless, they’ll -
spend the money on the “wrong” things.
Give us the money, we know what’s “right, ”
after all, they are just the homeless.
Paternalism is not a bad word to us; we bask in its hegemony, subconsciously.
We are important! We know what’s good!
Morality, autonomy...what’s that? Don’t confuse us, we know what’s best!
What’s that? You say. Dignity, freedom, worth of the person?
Trust us, we are the social workers. We know what’s best.
A Tear, A State of Pain

her eye glassifies with an empty tear
her hands shake, profusely
the voice on the phone is a blatant echo into her ear
the words are stuck, trapped.

her head raises with great melancholy,
her shoulders sink into her heavy coat
the letters repeat to form bitter words
her husband has succumb

and as her mind becomes absent,
and as her heart stops each somber beat,
that tear, residing in her eye,
drops.
Anxious. Fear. Guilt. Sadness...Repeat.
Anxious for anything life tosses my way, carelessly,
As if there's not enough on this plate.
Self-esteem crumbled by the sense of not feeling human.
Normal is just a word people like to think is true.
Fear strikes deep, sinks its roots in like razor blade teeth.
Leaving scars that only I can see, taunting me every time it comes near.
Guilt stings like alcohol, putting me to shame for what I cannot change.
Parts of me that refuse to change...
Sadness for the cycle that's about to birth again.
Anxious. Fear. Guilt. Sadness...Repeat
A Mother’s Greatest Loss

In the early morning darkness,
You opened your eyes, and they silently spoke.
She knew it was time, so she held you closely.
Your breath was deep,
And it released slowly, and peacefully
Like summer breeze; floating
When she looked again, a tranquil smile adorned your face
You were beautiful in that moment,
And it brought her comfort.
“You were much too young,” she thought.
And for the coming weeks, months or even years,
Her world will feel dismantled;
There will be a void; but she will move forward
for you; And she will keep your memory alive.
She will always be patiently waiting, and wishing to see you once again.
What Makes Me

I am from everywhere
   Migrating up north to work for money
   My weekends spent visiting my papa in jail
I am from a place where snitches get stitches or worse
   School lunches are free and housing is cheaper
   I am from food stamps
A home where my mom always cooked
   School lunches are free and housing is cheaper
   A home where one child is not enough
I am from a mother that never gives up
   I am from a father who has found his way
   I have battled many demons
I am a mother to my daughter who I thank for my survival
   I am a person who cares
Mr. Odyssey

A cynical world - the world is filled with chronic diseases.

Lie to me when you smile, please.

Father told me to be happy, mother yelled at me like a puppy, my younger sister was acting naughty.

O' where the dreamland could be found?

Yesterday I visited the Walker Art Center. A painting caught my attention and I couldn’t take my eyes off it. When I touched it, the pain flew in my veins; I was in a cage – a caged man.

The painting should be free; I should be free. Wondered how I pursue freedom if I’m already lost in my dream? “Come to me, dig my head till you see my naked brain. Don’t eat it until my blood is drained.”

No, I live in time. I travel in this chronic world. O’ where are my dearest loved ones?
So true it must be,
I point it out in others
and it is actually in me.
Let's Get to Work

I believe in love, I believe in goodness,
I believe in hard work and equality and equanimity.
I believe in patience, and I believe in the need for change.

I have love in my heart for all those that are of a different race,
a different ethnicity, a different religion,
a different gender and a different sexual orientation.

I am your ally.
Let us build a bridge of love and compassion.
We do not need to understand or agree.
We need an open mind and a can-do attitude.
We will lift ourselves up.
Our voices will be heard.
Never Again, we say. Together we are Stronger.
"There’s a difference between joyful and happy, you see it every day. Happy wears a mask- “comfort”- whose temporary disguise fades away. We ask, “Why suffer the punches?” in a relationship masked by shame. Then at a daughter’s performance finale and a dad who never came,

Because his, “One more drink won’t hurt,”
Makes us think, “Was his pleasure worth her pain?
But why should someone fight for JUSTICE?
What is this “JOY” there is to gain?

In the embrace from a refugee dad
Saying, “My family thanks you for helping me to provide.”
Or in the tear of a grieving son
Relieved by 36 years of anger having been put aside.

You see, we wear masks, too, as we enable our clients to find more.
At some point we tasted this “joy” that we enable them to search for."
The Monster Under the Bed

The monster under the bed and the boogie man in the closet
Shadow puppets on the wall. Tickling toes and pillow fights
Ladybugs and fireflies. Picking flowers in barefoot spring
Crayon marks and popsicle stains. All things of normal kids
  Baseball games, Hide-and-go-seek, a walk to the park
  I grieve the loss of childhood. What childhood?
  I had none. Not the normal one at least
I grieve the loss of what should have been and I grieve-
the loss of many things. My voice, self-love, strength
And in its place self-loathing, anger, sadness and hatred
I hate what was done but I cannot tell. I can never tell
  The lies that were told to me and I wish for
the boogie man in the closet and monsters under the bed
  At least then I’d be normal like any other kid
Shouting Match in a Whispering Gallery

Stifled tongues stay unsung when music fades to silence.
The drum keeping tempo is smothered by the riots.
Sounds matched in amplitude cancel when they collide,
Each one but an echo, with time will find demise.

Black and blue is dipped in red as bodies kiss the floor.
Mics held up to rich folks, megaphones held by the poor.
Picking up devices to amplify the rancor.
Posturing, endangered, as talons wrap the anger.

Just stand tall, prey will fall, and bow down to our fear.
The world spins around us if we pray it loud and clear.
This broken bit of reason sent ghosts to Vietnam.
Today it starts our wars at home and tries to keep us calm.

Am I the only one who knows?
You have to lean in close.
We’re in a gallery of whispers.
Devoid

For a long time, I longed and yearned for your love.
I wished for an embrace, emotionally not physically.
I got a glimmer of hope and yet again disappointed.
I spent so much time trying to convince you, myself, and others that it was meant to be.
Confused.
Scared.
Afraid of what "wouldn't be"
Got past it and glad I did.
Received blessings that only GOD can give.
I'm able to see more clearly the distractions have settled.
It's sad to say- same shit, different day.
For that very reason, I can't stay.
The Essence of Breaking

Sit on the shelf as a piece of ceramic.
Stay there and collect dust.
Be used, be filled, be poured by others.

Be involved in celebrations, intimate wine tastings,
and stand as you are
until held and needed again.

Keep doing that, if that is what you wish for in life.
Whoever molded, shaped, and curved you
never had that intention.

The pottery master made you to be fragile,
to crack,
to break,
to create a shattering noise
that reminds others of the joy found
outside of limitations.
My Elephant

“I need help”
I walk around with this elephant on my chest
No one can see my elephant
Not even me
But I can feel it.
My elephant will come and go
But most of time it’s there.
My elephant makes me want to run
To release the pain and fear by breaking a wall
But instead I sit still.
I sit still and act like there is nothing wrong.
In an ideal world I would have the courage to explain my elephant
But no one will understand.
So instead I say to myself
“I need help”
The Teacher of Time

I sat in Darkness with a Soul,
No ray of light to see,
As the soul confessed it’s Nights so harsh,
I tried to understand: Fearfully.

Until I came to understand that my Work and Call,
Meant I must wait in welcome with Souls
While sitting with their Infinite Nights,
Not stumble, trip, fall:

Into the Pit of the Overwhelmed.

For as Peter Pan lost his shadow,
So becomes Darkness in Time:

Dancing to distant Memory,
No longer Pain’s greatest Feature,
Transforming to become:
The Soul’s Greatest Teacher.
The Ages of Youth

Young as a child was four or five, as a teenager was ten.
Young as a woman of twenty-four was fifteen or sixteen then.
Young as a mother of thirty-two jumped to twenty-three,
And now as an elder of ninety-six, it’s seventy I long to be.
Social Worker

What is my job they want to know, it’s so much more than what I show
A case manager helping with needs, a protector of rights planting seeds
A peer and a coach to all we meet, so many challenges within this fleet
A therapist who lends an ear, a protector against the fear
A positive influence in the depths of hell, patiently waiting to break that shell
A teacher of subjects with no name, a constant defender against your shame
A resource list in my head burst, always putting your needs first
The one who doesn’t know it all, but can guarantee to take the call
My work is vast and overwhelming at times; the end of shift whistle never chimes
But this profession becomes your life, giving voice to those in strife
Making a difference wherever you can, agents of change upon this land
I have a title that sums it up, I’m a Social Worker and I’ll never give up
Am I My Sister Keeper?

To the few who say I am not. Am I not the knot that entangles the have and have nots?
To some who say I am not. Am I not the dot that connect their lot?
To anyone who say I am not. Am I not the one who was once brought, caught, even shot, left to rot, end up in their plot and forgot?
To all who speak the Truth “Ain’t I a Woman Too”, so I cannot, not be my sister’s keeper!
6th Street, Skid Row

The street splits with hopeless fatigue.
Where to go? Here. This is where our hollow soul goes; for now.
Too weary to care. To try. Just need to survive. One more night, Lord.
This stained blanket awkwardly lands on the cold sidewalk concrete. The stead established.
To sleep. In fear. The sideways view of the world, on high alert, as both eyes close.
Dreaming.
I look around and see the world in shambles
No regard for the constitution, let alone the pre-amble
  The election came and went
Time, money and energy was wrongfully spent
  Voices on the right, voices on the left
  Some rejoiced, while others wept
Talk of who is wrong, and of who is right
Yet the most important things, seem out of sight
The happiness of many, controlled by a few
  No more wisdom, but greed in lieu
Lost and Found

I connect to you.

“I'm thirsty,” (I'm dying)
“I'm here,” (I'm learning)
Twenty years old; an intern, new to death
Ninety years old; a woman, old to life
You could not swallow.

You died that night, your husband spinning into his dementia vortex.
Months later, he asks:
“Where is Victoria?” (I'm lost)
“Tell me about Victoria,” (You can find her)

He connects to me.
God’s Broken Children

What fell next was tears from her eyes
Her tears become mine, I’m tired of the lies
Her mother does drugs
The heart strings, it tugs
God deliver her from this darkness.

The caseworker holds her close and tight
“Baby, you do not have to fight her fight”.
“I love her so much”.
“Baby, you can’t be her crutch”.
God deliver her from this great pain.
50K Someday!

$20 an hour does not make,
Let's see what might be at stake.
It's a lifetime of giving so others can live
A lifetime of giving; keeps asking Me to give.
Altruism aside, we need to survive.
We need to make money,
to render blood and honey
So, please please make it worthwhile to keep bringing my smile,
Make me know I am needed or wanted and that there is care,
For each passing day it continues to wear,
to wear on my soul, to wear on my conscience,
All for the sake of my beneficence
My heart is in the mountains
    Not by the sea
God bring me to this place
    I want to be
Show me your ways
    Be by my side
I will let you pilot
    And be my guide
When will this be?
    This dream?
Only you know
    Only you can see
Take me to this land
    Where I want to be
Home

If you ever cried pain that turned to relief because sadness was the only familiar place you knew, If you ever had life pulled from under you like the world’s most cruel joke, If you ever lost something whether piece by piece or all at once, If you were ever tricked into thinking that you don’t matter, If you ever for one second felt the indignity of being broken without a choice--Come here & let me teach you different. Let me show you how to count your heartbeats on fingertips, to time your breaths until butterflies turn into bulldozers and flight turns into fight. Let me show you how many cracks there are in a redwood and how beautifully your little pieces kaleidoscope into a portrait of strength. Let me show you the song that social work can make of your dissonant story. Let me show you the way home.
Compassion in Action

Finding strength in the struggle
Engaging with the other
Recognizing the hope for healing
Listening...listening...listening

Going through grief with
Addressing anxiety with
Diving into that deep depression with
Feeling...feeling...feeling

Doing with until done without
Mentoring, modeling, guiding
Going that one. more. mile.

Giving...giving...giving
Letting go.
Watching.
Smiling...smiling...smiling...
I Wish I Could Ask

If I walk around with joy today... do you think that my side won?

If I walk around with joy today...
   do you think I don’t have love and compassion for you?

If I walk around with joy today... do you think I don’t see you?

If I walk around with anger today...
   do you think I think I’m better than you?

If I walk around with anger today...
   do you think I think I must care about people more than you?

If I walk around with anger today...
   do you think that I must be unwilling to be a team player?

If I walk around with anger today...
   my eyes will stop seeing, my ears will stop listening,
   and my heart will stop growing.

If I walk around with joy today...
   I’m choosing to see, I’m choosing to hear, and I’m choosing to love.
A Day As A Social Worker

I never thought I'd be
In a real position to see
A client go from mad
To actually being glad

They walk out of the office with a stride
Today we’re both so full of pride
They thought their life had taken its toll
Then they were finally able to reach their goal!

I never thought I’d be
In a real position to see
A person go from being down
To turning their life completely around

My job requires a lot
Much more than I ever thought
But every once in a while
Even I can’t help but smile
Path of a Social Worker

In the Beginning, the Lord said, I have a Task – take care of My Sheep.
Like Jerimiah, I protested for the Way of the Task looked hard and steep.
After traveling roads of life’s mistakes, I gave in to walk His Way
With my toolbox of caring, love, warts, and learning,
Down that Path I went and trod it yet still today.
On my Wandering Path, I have smelled the oaks of the Appalachians,
Tasted the dust of the Navaho high desert, felt the deep summer heat of Inter-city streets, and touched the winter winds of the rural north.
I have marched with King, worked the streets, fought for voiceless,
And counseled those seeking Relief from Hurt and the Growth to go Forth.
Held the hands of the dying, Sought hope for addicted, and Shared the Healing of Laughter in the darkest of times and places.
In fifty plus years, what have I learned walking the Social Work Traces?
Being a social worker is not a job or career—not any of that at all.
Being a social worker is who I am and will be until Death’s Call.
Dependable...

An adjective, meaning that it is an attribute, used to describe a person, place or thing.
It means to be trustworthy and reliable...
The person you would want you to be in your time of need.
YOU ARE DEPENDABLE.
You have an attribute that enhances all others.
When there is work to be done.
When a joke needs to be said.
When a truth needs to be spoken.
YOU ARE DEPENDABLE.
In times of need, joy, sorrow, confusion and confession...
YOU ARE DEPENDABLE.
Everyone needs a dependable.
A person, place or thing.
YOU ARE DEPENDABLE.
A Day in the Life [of a social worker]

No one tells you the pain, anguish, sorrow or fear that will surge through your veins
When you sit across a mother who just lost her child and you [only you]
   As the brave social worker
Help her choose a mortuary

No professor, or lecture or book prepares you for the
   Unaltered Joy, Gratitude and Pure Bliss of witnessing a
Newborn fondly look at their parent's eyes...wondering, observing and soaking it all in
Or the moment a teenager lets you into their world because you [only you] get it

Nothing prepares you for life as a social worker
Except.... Maybe this

To be truly present. Wearing your heart not on your sleeve but PROTRUDING out to the world
Saying I am here.
   With you. By you. Near you.
As an advocate, guide, supporter and witness
To you my dear client: When you are ready, I am here.
2016

Were we complacent?
Trump, Pence, Bannon, Carson, Price.
Call to action now.
Owl Butterfly

Unseeing eyes, unblinking
glare at mine
in a never-ending staring contest.

Silent observers, still
search the other for a story hidden deep,
neither quite satisfied with what they find.

A light breeze whispers between us,
lashes flutter-
connection lost.

As she slips back into the camouflage of the trees,
I catch a glimpse of the secret I was looking for:
royal blue adorning her majestic wings
just behind those owl eyes.
Decision Making in Group Work

with teeth gritted
the group groped
and grappled
until they gradually
found common ground

to gain a grip
on the grueling task
ahead they agreed
to grind coffee
to be served
with granulated sugar
in green cups
I Am a Social Worker

I walk on echoing pond ripples,  
So all who follow after me can see where to place their feet.  
I am no guardian, but I am a Social Worker.
I strap on make shift wings and play chicken with the sun,  
So all who follow after me can see that progress requires bravery.  
I am no angel, but I am a Social Worker.
I swim to the moon and hold by breath until I take my first step,  
So all who follow after me can see that struggle is part of the journey.  
I am no seraph, but I am a Social Worker.
I climb over thunderstorms and catch lightning bolts with my palm,  
So all who follow after me can see that strength is developed painfully.  
I am no hero, but I am a Social Worker.
I patch missing and broken hearts using pieces of my own,  
So all who follow after me can see that they are loved and never alone.  
I am no savior, but I am a Social Worker.
Social Work Is…

People ask me, 'What do you do?'
Funny you should ask, as I would rather you ask what I don't do.
I don't walk around with wings on my shoulders, nor does my heart bleed.
I defy the stereotype,
I break the mold.
I do ache for the world, but I transform the ache into action.
I don't heal the sick, but I can help them cry.
I can't save the world, but I can help make it a better place.
I don't rescue children and families, but I can help them become stronger.
I can't prevent evil from spreading, but collectively we are stronger than evil.
I can't give power to the voiceless, but I can give them a megaphone.
I don't tell others what to do, but I can guide them to their passions.
My work is done when there is peace on earth, and all have enough to get by.
My work is done when I have inspired others to take the work and run.
Until then, I keep calm and carry on.
Intake

She uses the word rape when I ask about her father.
Breaks the cycle and her silence with one admission
Note how she shrugs, stares at the floor, and says I pulled the trigger.
Her words like bullet points reverberate off bare walls and
throw back echoes. We sit on hard red chairs as old as her pain and
listen to the hollow cry of service gaps.
I assess her refusal to swallow bitter pills as part of a
growing sentence missing a period. We connect when her
dry, cracked lips - split from sighs and slips of the tongue -
cut corners to escape bleeding implications so raw
they suck me in. I almost forget I can’t save her.
If anguish has its language, then compassion does too.
So in the place of words, I hold space for her
heavy doubts and pregnant pauses to swell larger than
her belly bearing the weight of my question
Privilege

I'm sitting beside you, my spirited partner
but the sheath of pain blockades your reward.
All I can do is clinch, breathe, tighten, ease into
and seek down deeper into despair.
A thought of suicide momentarily saves me...
followed by a taste of what I can remember of Gin...
warmth arises.
I'm just human
I just want an out like you, you and you.
I'm sitting behind a desk now, across a stranger.
You can't see her, it's back again
my familiar friend.
I want to stab her because she is slowly killing me.
But to trade it all for a tenderness so pure
for this person who too sees no way out.
This is the Work.
The Fabric of America

The fabric of America covers us
As we try...in the beds that we made.

We long for the warmth of its comfort,
Rich in texture, in hue, and in shade.

Hand-crafted from slave-picking cotton -
Improved on by factories now rotten...
Dark reds align every border...
It's the blood of its sons and its daughters.

It's an heirloom of many traditions - Oh, just gaze on its diverse condition.

Will the weight of its past crush us, too, as we hope for its dreams to come true?

No...shiny threads...can you see them... here and there?

It's the social workers... busy...taking care
...always mending the America we share.
Young Spirits

Let the children laugh, I tell you…let them laugh and play!
Let their hearts sing melodies of joy; don’t shunt their good spirits away.
They will experience a life filled with obstacles if sorrow leads their way.

Our boys will grow up to be men filled with adversity and despair.
Our girls will grow up to be callous women lacking their nature to care.

So, let the children laugh I tell you; let them laugh and play!
They will experience a life filled with opportunities if joy leads their way.
Our boys will grow up to be successful men; leaders of the world they face.
Our girls will grow up to be prosperous women filled with love and grace.

So, let the children laugh I tell you; let them laugh and play!
The children are our future and WE must lead their way!
So, laugh children….LAUGH!
Unread Chapters

Slicing potatoes, the TV toothpaste ad finds the Social Worker
Years later off the job in her outdated kitchen
Mind and heart flooded and charged with the power of memory
The dark and dank motel room of that homeless teen parent,
Swearing through the bloody gauze of a nearly fatal dental infection
Her son *would* learn the oral hygiene she never received;
A new offering to her ever growing catalogue of promises.
The Social Worker always believed her bright eyes, proof enough;
Child development and milestones were celebrated together.
The Social Worker recalls a play space and baby items carefully stored:
A tiny little home carved out in space not meant to be home.
And my goodness how he must have grown, she thinks now,
(Suddenly aware of her growing hunger for homefries and eggs).
Chapters she will never read lead her back to the knife and potatoes.
Homeostasis

Scaled-over eyes,
Haven’t opened in days.
Tubes keep it ticking,
In mysterious ways.
The one nurse that visits,
Never mutters a thing.
Outside: brown leaves
Having clung on ‘til spring.
I Hear the Music Soaring...

I hear the music soaring, proud and free
The music of everyday people soaring—
Each song or tune representing a different individual.

The music of nature soaring
Each bird and tree whispering sweet songs
to the Earth.

The music of children soaring
Sweet laughter that reminds us of our childhood and innocence.

The music of silence soaring
How peaceful it is to hear nothing....

Soaring everywhere is the music of people,
children, and nature all representing a different
language that everyone can understand.
Pipeline

A deep carving
Tunneled through the core
Weighted free fall
Slipping through
A forgotten cell
Fluttering freedom
Chained to longing
The other side
Conceivable
Petrified
Unreachable
Closure

Lane closure up ahead
ETA delayed. News reports, driver fell asleep at the wheel ———
Tired and its ramifications.
Consequences of exhaustion...
Will I arrive on time and get to where I need to be———
no turning back -
looking for the nearest way to escape disaster——
   no end in sight - I ponder alternative routes to destination.
Distract from the frustration of not being able to move—
   Speeding or slowing down, -----------
   timing is everything.--------
An unsettling discomfort of knowing
this journey is going to take longer than anticipated
I hate being stuck.
Will I ever open up? _________

Gila Cohen, Columbia University, 1992, Rutgers (2019)
only Darkness, but
we reach our hands in, knowing
together, Hope grows
To Care

You can try to understand but don’t tell me that you do.
You can’t know my situation unless it’s something you’ve been through.

Have you ever been so hungry that your stomach is numb from the pain?
Have you weighed minimal effort to negotiate a beneficial gain?

Have you ever been so close to rock bottom that you don’t even care why?
Have you see young children so old that they can no longer cry?

You have no magic tricks to perform in this system I know so well,
Can you direct me to your heaven now that earth is housing hell?

If you want to help me then hear my story; be still and listen while I share.
I don’t want your understanding. I just need someone to care.
Social Work Rules

Social work jobs are not a task for any person
Someone’s difficult situation, you do not want to worsen
Follow these rules and you’ll be okay
Just remind yourself of these, each and every day
Rule number 1: There is never a problem from which we run
Rule number 2: When sharing a story, never say who
Rule number 3: “Always about client, never about me”
Rule number 4: Ask what is necessary, never less never more
Rule number 5: Social justice is the goal for which we strive
Rule number 6: When in doubt, the use of silence is one of the best tricks
Rule number 7: Don’t make assumptions, not everyone believes in heaven
Rule number 8: Never ask a previous or current client out on a date
Rule number 9: Counseling sessions aren’t your time to whine
Last but not least, rule number 10
Remember to take time off every now and then
The Seams

Winter’s frightening comfort seeps in between the seems,
Hidden light extends beyond our curiosity.
Fears struggle to aluminate darkened rooms at daybreak.
Will want prevail, or have I spent my penny.
I sink below the chipped toothed surface, disappear
Ears concealed from hum of need.
Then toes touch bottom the deja vu of lost direction will push past
The veil lifts in the warm breeze
I regain momentum, there is hope in contrasts
Renew subscription
Set the reminder before you dream
Tune your heart and place the dial
The wake is found with the light of others.
Loved Little White Pill,
You condemn
My thoughts and fears
You dilute
My dreads and tears
You confine
My anxiety and hate
My memories
You conflate.
Habitually you seem to diminish
A sizeable part of me,
Something I have not quite finished,
My character and personality
This Was the Year I Made Peace With Confusion

This was the year I made peace with confusion

I secretly thought, “Finally, the world will meet its maker!”
while the sad truths simmered through the mad pavement,
the yowling winds blew unremitting honesty,
and a high-pitched static clung to the walls like a smoker’s shame

As doubt and dullness seduced me, we danced ourselves to oblivion

Alas, my cheek brushed the gray sidewalk
and the world was spinning,
the view of a drunk on her penultimate bender

So I turned my back on the cacophony of a thousand dead generals
And the merchants who pushed their carts

And I opened my bosom to the mothers and prophets
who spoke as softly as the dust in my favorite room
I leaned in and opened my ears as wide as the ocean
and pledged my allegiance to madness and liberation
First Cigarette

my father
prison, jail, arrested
in and out 20+ years
betrayed my family, his family
bad memories of his mistakes
his lies, cheating, drinking, drugs
destroying everything
he touches with his hands
i smell the alcohol
i smell the smoke
my burnt coat was supposed to keep me safe
my heart is closed
With Ana

Seated, keenly attending
The splash of truth
To clarify
This tangle, that cloud

The stunning calm
In neither you nor me
But deep about us
In the essential air

Given, waiting
To be uncovered, free
It does not take from me
To give to you
Enchant Me

Magic is but an imagery of illusion
In the midst of a real world full of confusion.
Within ourselves it provides an escape;
Blending art and fantasy all in to Fate.

A crystal ball high on a shelf
Covered in dust and lost in itself.

Our souls are masked like clever sleuths;
Inner peace is ruled by love and truths.
Courage and discipline cry out their curse
As we become one with the Universe.
Client Guru

“I am a spiritual being having a human experience” she said.
Mother, survivor and protector.
They jot be down as emotional, manipulative and aggressive
Do you not fight for what’s right?
Who are you?
Can’t you be a therapist and a person.
I fight beside you, you teach me my guru.

Lone wolf I think of you.
Lismarie Acevedo, Rutgers University, (2017)

Challenge of Hope

Hope in the eyes of the ones we see
Coming to us for peace, serenity
This work is stressful in a good way
full of constant challenges every day
so many problems and diagnoses
battle after battle each client faces
We care, we guide, they persevere
A challenge of hope, failure they fear
to give a glimpse of needed change
a chance of acceptance, success in range
to turn it around and face the challenge
resolving the issues, together we manage
Smiles that follow when session’s completed
Case closed, for the job of a social worker
happiness for them is what is well awarded.
Sound

Bright voices flutter, light, lost in circumstance. 
Cards they were handed are bent and scattered. 
They are abandoned, they speak with no chance. 
We stand proxy so that they may be heard in the crowd. 
Through their silence, as their Audibility, we must ring loud 
With Change.

The System muffles their cries, their voices are dimmed in the wind. 
We must sound so their voices may be known 
Again and heard.
I used to believe that it was I who must change. 
It was I that must restructure my cognitions and 
rewire my neural pathways. 
Rewrite my narrative. 
Restrict my 
self. 

It took so little and so much to see that wasn’t it at all: 
so little – an inkling, a hunch, a subtle perspective shift, 
and so much – the experience of living in my body every day. 
Now I believe that this work is about claiming the space that is 
inherrently mine. Inherently yours. Inherently ours, 
even and especially if we are big. Or loud or black or female. 
It is about expanding, and understanding 
that it is not I or you or we who must change. It is the world. 
It is I and you and we who must change the world.
Maybe the poem you write here today will change everything. Maybe it will convince you to never to be without a pencil and a notebook, a community, and the trusting of your own thoughts. Maybe one day you'll remember this Monday morning poetry group and you'll smile and jot down a poem. Maybe when your pen slips from your hand to the floor you'll understand the necessity of picking it up again. Maybe one day you will start a writing group and I'll read about your young poets and the adult you became and I'll smile, and jot down a poem. Maybe next week you'll write your best poem ever and read it to your mom and she'll cry because she’s lost her words. It’s ok, you'll say, I've found them. Maybe I’ll wear that shirt to Walgreens that says Poetry is NOT a luxury and a perfect stranger will ask me who my favorite poet is and we’ll smile for this random conversation in the cashier’s line where no one usually speaks. Maybe poetry will help us break all the useless rules that keep people apart. Maybe poetry will be the bridge back home.
In His Eyes

Hushed tones and side glances
Sweaty palms and sighs
Thoughts of cutting and helplessness
That’s what I see in his eyes
Does my forty five minutes help ease the pain
Hardened souls crying steel tears that ping down the drain
Uncertainty of what’s real and what’s a lie
That’s what I see in his eyes
Desperation at its peak
Interpersonal, CBT, psychotherapy which is the best technique
I see the pain, I want to help
My knowledge base shields my cries
I see myself when I look at him
That’s what I see in his eyes
Forget Me Not  for Bryce, Melissa, Caterina

It’s the symmetry of the face that draws us near—beautiful and enchanting. But it’s the juxtaposition of parts: the mouth, the nose, the eyes, that makes all the difference. Shouldn’t the soul be our focus when savoring loveliness, where the heart of a person resides? I try to look beyond missing tooth, shock of hair, sunken eyes, marked arms. I imagine there’s a story there: beneath the mess a beautiful flower, soft, innocent, craving, climbing out of the wreck. But flowers need to be cultivated and loved. So we choose sun and rain or a cage with bars and shitty food. Punishment long after the debt’s been paid. These flowers fill my mind, reaching out with no hand to grasp. Our decision remains long after death arrives. A broken community has lost a most beautiful flower.
Dear Client,

I’m your Social Worker. I’m here to advocate.
I know you’re feeling broken.
I know your life’s at stake.
Know that I’m committed,
I chose Social Work because of you.
I know sometimes that life’s unfair,
you deserve equal opportunity too.
Social Workers see past your brokenness.
We see all that you can be.
You’re our brothers, our mothers, our children.
You’re me, you’re he, you’re she.
Let’s together seek Social Justice.
Let’s show your needs justified.
Know you’re always in good hands,
with a Social Worker by your side.
Snapshots in the Line of Duty

Forty-two, yellow-slickered, self-appointed cop directing rush hour traffic
Fifty-three, state hospital bride-to-be phoning Don Ho to sing at her wedding
Sixty-one, dead grandmother bitten by a brown recluse spider while picking greens
Twenty, drug-addicted, selling little sister’s bike to buy a fix
Seventy, secretly surviving sexual abuse experienced when five
Fourteen, intelligent, pretty, pregnant, homeless
Ten, legally blind, broken glasses, broke parents, squinting to complete school work
One social worker, listening, reflecting, caring, problem-solving, facilitating Healing
The Tale of a Social Worker

A passion to help is our motivation
We care for those all over the nation

The young and the old, the meek and the bold
We strive to help so their hearts don't grow cold

We believe in finding strengths and giving hope
We help individuals find the best ways to cope

We learn a new lesson from each client we meet
We work hard to help them stand on their own feet

Advocate, educate, and manage are a few of our roles
Improving society is one of our great goals

The hours are many and the days are long
But we have found that this field is where our hearts belong
Guided by an indefinite future,
Here you are - stranded
The story, you say, comes from a
Difficult past
The depth crowds treatment
But I am here, familiar with failure
Accustomed to the message...
Here for change
Silly streets, we'll be free from you
There’s A Place for You

Have you ever wanted to be a voice for the voiceless?
Hope for the hopeless..?
A helper in times of despair?
There’s a place for you my friend..

As the warm sunlight rises in the east and sets in the west
Sun kissing the lilies of the valley; revealing the beauty and splendor of the earth below..
It’s symmetrical to the beauty of the social workers heart and consistent drive to help and bring change..
You can always count of the sun to rise causing darkness to depart..
The gentle breeze that flows through the tress are the breath of an advocator for the forgotten and abused..

High and lifted up with an S on our chest fighting to bring change, order, and hope..
For the now and future generations to come..
There’s is a place for you my friend.
Fairy tales

His face was plastered all over the hospital like a wanted poster. It was touch and go for her after he slammed her into the wall at the bar.

She survived and left our safe and caring cocoon. She attempted to navigate the world for about a year on her own. The nurses sat me down and said “We have some news.” They told me that she had married him.

Love conquers all seems to live only in fairy tales.
Mr. B, 82, Brings a Globe to Therapy

He said carrying it across town was a lot like lifting and hefting his own glued and papered soul. He hoped the ground he walked stayed flat. As he moved, the modeled earth’s parallels and meridians wobbled. He asks, *is it still desire, wanting to brush my wife’s hair off her face when she’s not here anymore?* He considers the place inside of him that has lost purpose; he says sorrow can lay down across continents. Together we wonder: who hasn’t been tired or lovelorn, confused or out of prayers at the gates of a crossing? He notices how his hands rest on a body of water, a sea unchartered. His fingers are stretched, laid bare as on all the muscled or smoothed surfaces he’s known and tended.
Ferendez Raygun Lowery, Auburn University, (2018)

You left me a widow today, fangs bared with spite
Pain rising up like a frightful moon on the house of misery
I watched, frozen, as you carried away the urn of our love
I pleaded with our ghost of memories to pour out our ashes
And let the soils of adversity nurture seeds of my strength
To no avail, your footsteps became tracings around my heart
An irreplaceable part of me which saw me expendable
Was my love not enough to break your prideful spirit?
Using the pieces to build a house founded on a rock of hope
For what cannot be seen, lies ahead
Yet only revealed to the blind who tread without guidance
Do not return, for the biting cold under the front porch
Compares naught to the curdling shriek of a broken heart
Oh, how I waited, frozen in time, until this love vanished
As a melted ice cube kisses a sock on the kitchen floor
Standing by the Star-spangled Banner

I saw bubbles rise from the ocean
from a tiny body breathing last, face down.
And bubbles of last breath breaking seeping blood
in Orlando, Charleston, and Sandy Hook.

I saw sighs of dejection and agony in Kentucky
holding an unsigned nuptial license.
When hatred defined boundaries
When being different was termed decadent
When pretense trampled veritable conscience.

Those last breaths and sighs will rise and unite
Breaking walls and opening doors
Like an Arc for everyone, with everyone.
None left out, no breath lost.
Under the same banner
With stars of all colors.
Charlie

He blew it again,
hoarded food,
rarely smiled.
Most nights wet the bed,
worst of all,
denied it.

The foster mother called,
he doesn't fit in,
he has to go.
I've packed his things,
pick him up at school,
he doesn't know.
Empathetic Justice

And why this race to individual isms
When the institutions hide truth in catechisms
Truth is, your challenge is not just to find the culprit
Challenge is to change doctrine not just storm the pulpit

Ignorance sees inconsistencies clearly
and answers swiftly with march or rally
Not realizing that the fact was fait accompli
Writ in policy protecting them not you or me

You take it out on the meritocracy
Judge me only based on merit is crazy
But, danger is not the demon you do see
Demon and danger is lack of empathy

Now, you thought your best move was waging war
You fight valiantly like a giant true
But the G.I. didn’t come through any more
Now, like an ant powerless are you
Veterans and Social Work

This day always makes my throat ache.
"Thank you for your service"
-a band aid for a wound too deep.

"You don't know the things I did!" You are right.
"You don't know the things I saw!" You are right.
"You don't know how hard it was to call." You are right.

I'm angry that I can't help faster.
I'm angry that all aren't honored.
I'm angry that others after you will need us.

All I can do is help you apply.
All I can do is keep you on the phone until help comes.
All I can do is tell the world that you hurt.
Promise of Richness

Why am I poor? The child asked
What can I say to one whose life
Begs to be filled with rich promises that are kept

Promises to be fed
With the milk of kindness

Promises to be heard
With the listening ear of the heart

Promises to be guided
By the wisdom of age gleaned from a life well lived

Promises to be healed
Of skinned knees and broken hearts

Promises to be taught
Reading, writing, 'rithmatic, the way out and the way in

Teach me, I asked,
How to keep promises and we will both be rich
Trying Times

They said, “clients are unwilling to change.”
They said, “I have Tried.”
They said, “this will not work.”
They said, “I have done everything I can.”

They said, “I do not know why I am here.”
They said, “I just want my kids back.”
They said, “I am Trying.”
They said, “I am doing everything I can.”

I ask who is truly Trying?
Brown Noise

Noise is what happens when a circuit has been changed—
a system designed to function in one pre-set manner, broken.

(unplug yourself)
Feel the real currents you’ve been numb to—
The frequency of brown noise is best heard in low decibels
but the sounds of 123 have already been labeled

(dead air)
The revolution will not be televised
because the revolution is not really happening
since revolutions are excuses
for them to create new techni-color films with our own blood
so we sit silent, while the programs run on loops

#trayvonmartin #ericgarner #tamirrice #walterscott
#reikaboyd #sandrabland #mikebrown #freddiegray
#altonsterling #philandocastile
Brandon Lee, Rutgers University

I, Witness

I was there to see your life
Your light
Your colors
Your warmth.

With every treatment
I saw your light slowly fade.
But even in pain
You were polite to visitors
And still continued to fight.

I wish I could take it away
But there was nothing more I could do
Except,
To be a hand to hold
A smile to warm
And a witness to your life.
Each Day Anew

As tassels turn, we plan to change the world.
Then Life interferes and it begins to unfurl,
like a flag thrashing in a furious wind.
People are cruel; parents hurt and abuse.
Feelings are injured; others often get used.
Filled with unrelenting hope, in time, we become thick-skinned.
We yearn for encouragement to reinforce the belief
for those with afflictions, find swift solace in their grief.
Do not give up. Do not give in. Fight for dignity, justice and worth.
We persist in our search for the good on this grand, tormented earth.
Picking up the Tab at Starbucks

Starbucks, soft jazz, she a multi-mocha Frappuccino, I an Americano, her eyes narrow as she starts to take the measure of her life to mine, harder now with no GPAs to declare the winner. So good to see you again, who are you working with now? Ruby lipped, flicking her suit lapel with coral claw, I try to smooth my lumpy black NGO sweater. Cambodian refugees, I answer, and you? Oh, I don’t work with people, I’m all macro now, you know, admin, so I can serve larger populations—more impact that way, but working with people is great for some people, she in a freefall of condescension, people who can’t escape the micro warren, with all its sweat, bad teeth and tears, trying to make ends meet with only miserable middles, bedbugs leaping from shaking hands. She boldly asks, well, how much do you make? As I reveal my new GPA, she recoils from my poverty—but she cannot know of my true riches. While she may live in the wealth of Excel, I take up arms against Pol Pot, a warrior for a larger population—survivors and their demanding dead.
The Walk

The day is crisp and bright,
The Little girl walks along the road,
The railroad track is strangely close by,
Just waiting for the story that will be told.

The dim days for her have passed by so slow,
Nights and mornings of not a single morsel near.
The beer cans just keep piling up,
Along with the footsteps at night that cause her so much fear.

The railroad tracks have paved a straight line,
Through the country side and right through her heart,
She longs for peace and solitude from the filth,
And deliverance that will set her apart.

Her young soul can take no more,
The neglect and all the pain that she has carried inside,
Has caused her to go on the longest walk of her life,
Across the railroad track just as it passed by.
Struggling Alone

HELP ME was scrawled on the note taped to his front door. Alone, he did not want to be, in the night Wading in blackness, connections severed, aborted hope. “Please,” he said flatly, his voice quiet. “Just one more night?” He had no one, I knew. One of a trillion souls, Sharks of darkness circling them, infinitum. This man with long, curled hair, multiple shades of grey...

In his face I saw, who he once was: A child, soft blue eyes, silky round cheeks To whom the world was unkind, explained his sister. A beautiful small human, rejected then abandoned Foraging through the loveless chaos, Searching for warmth in a forest of monsters. “I will try for another night,” I answered, breaking the rules; Because they broke him first
Knocking on your cellar door  
I hope to descend those dark creaky steps  
To the soft underbelly of your mind  
Tender hot spots of your soul  
Walls around your heart  

But there is a huge refrigerator blocking my way  
Filled with all sorts of  
Clutter, half eaten sandwiches, Tupperware containers  
Your dead brother stands by, points and  
I wonder where to begin  

The three of us clean it out together  
Reminding me: this social work business is a messy affair  
Finished for the day you thank me and I  
Head home happy, only to find  
My own huge refrigerator blocking the front door
What Is At Stake

In the aftermath of the election
I Spent all day feeling angry, out of context,
not entitled to the fear creeping in?
Friends, wealthy white girls crying in bathtubs,
#broken
But for who? For what?
Later on, in class,
Reality hits.
A colleague from Liberia sobbing
for the promise of a better life.
A colleague from Argentina
Without a green card, worried
she might not be here next year.
A colleague, white mom, black dad,
Afraid to go outside.
broken.
This is for who, this is for what.
For The First

social workers
without social worker moms
from whom to pull threaded advice or
push against their seams,
at the very least.

do you tire of going home,
searching for archives
of all of the
paper copy recipes
of all of the
meals you’ve never shared?
Battle Scars

Together we sit in silence, her eyes drifting down.
I can determine what has happened, but still I sit quietly.
She looks around the room almost as if she is searching for an answer.
She gazes with a look of confusion, loss, and trauma.
When I catch her gaze, she quietly murmurs its my fault.
I realize then my listening ear is the only response she needs.
She says she is sorry for not doing more to help herself, her children.
She gives herself time to formulate the words.
Your children must be important to you, I respond.
I feel that I have failed them.
    I try to keep the screaming down, the punches behind closed doors.
    The truth is I am not the only victim here.
There is pain, the feeling of loss and defeat.
I see a woman with compassion taking steps toward redemption.
I see a warrior.
The Portrait of a Young Woman as a Social Worker

I counsel teenagers. Really, I still feel like one.
There’s a new client for me today. “Depressed,” I’m told.
The familiar fears strike me again.

How can I prove life has value... even in high school?
Hypocritical, it seems,
when there are still so many times I slip into dread,
filled with doubts about who I am, who I should be.

I know I got into social work to help others.
But sometimes I think I’m still just trying to save myself.

We meet, converse. I’m more awkward than professional.
But she laughs a little at my lame joke. I’m grateful.
For awhile, she even looks up from the floor.

Our session ends, and she leaves. I haven’t saved her.

But, maybe for a second, she felt something other than numb.
And maybe for today... that’s enough.
The Voices We Hear

It is so loud. Dear God, it is so loud!  
The cries from the people, the pleas from the crowds!  
The pain of the impoverished, the struggle of the oppressed.  
The horror of the abused, and the suffering of the rest.  
We hear their plight, we look inward and say,  
“How do we help them, there must be a way!”  
We slave over papers, over research and interventions.  
We hone our skills and engage in deep self reflection.  
But it is too much, the world cannot be fixed  
Their cries only grow louder, perhaps…we just quit.  
...Shhhh…Listen, truly listen…The answer is there.  
For when we listen, we can heal their despair.  
To be open and give your whole self, is the gift that we share,  
In return, they give themselves, and that privilege we bear.  
The cries always call, and they rattle our core.  
If we do not listen, their voices will fall… upon deaf ears… forevermore
Portraits of December

Under faded linen, Mr. Cliff’s belly rises then sets, toes rustling unseen in the blue of predawn. Today, he will no longer be able to reach them for washing. He prays to the lord anyway, thankful for life and limb. Next door, Mrs. Branch bows to the inevitable through dust settling in new light. Her doctor said yoga would keep her vital. *No such thing at this age.* She did not mince words. Time carves creases onto the surface of her story—I peer inside the folds. Outside, Mr. West huddles under a threadbare crown, and pale orange spreads thin across the sky. His tar-bathed fingertips graze a feral coat, and the cloud of exhaust from his lips is a frail S.O.S. undetected by robins flying south.
Weeknight Hero

Though I was prepared, I was unprepared to see you sitting there, in a chair, by the corner of the bed.

You looked up and could see on my face what you most likely have seen so many times before –

a look of surprise, a sudden smile, two eyes wide open.

Hello, I am the hospital social worker.
I’d like to talk to you about some paperwork.

You, whom I had watched on TV every week as a child.
Me, about to talk to you about your advance directives.

I never imagined that we would meet or that it would be here.
The Lineage of Silence

Women, we know this, because it is ours, even though we are not the only ones that own it. This silence runs through us like an upstream river, like those fleeing the face of Katrina, like the blood drawn from your own fingertips, like a stampede of hunted prey and like Sunday’s shame. Wrong but natural, cruel yet comfortable, far but oh so familiar. You are our familiar. We know you, we breathe you, we inherited you, silence. With mouths agape and screams smothered by his gaze, our voices shoved out of history’s veins, and stories scolded as nonsense. We are you, silence. Still.
Life on Fire

There’s a rumor floating around these days,
Solitary success, pride, and individuality are a lasting faze.
Forget the better off on your own!
To that end we hurt each other and think we’re stronger alone.
Instead, run toward awaiting tragedy, human stories, and mistakes.
Become intimate with vulnerable broken pieces, and raise the stakes.
Break your heart wide open, explosions of fantasies unfold,
puzzle pieces called truth, union, love of life come together so bold.
Don’t be shy. Look at me, I am here and going nowhere,
to empower your strength within, despite the compilation of sin committed by you, and to you, and together.
Affects of which are heavy as a bomb and light as a feather.
Blown away and what’s left is dust, grains of a past life, a past role.
Set fire to your soul until you are whole.
A lit match and dry wood, and from the ground, rise.
Hope

A word that pushes your courage off a cliff and demands gravity to break its philosophy

It stops your nightmares in its tracks and allows you to paint your dreams with vivid images of your most fantastic fantasy

Creating a world where peace transcends and broken hearts and homes are able to mend

They say we are all born with a purpose, caterpillars, awaiting metamorphosis. Relying on learn as we go courage

Embracing the encounters that reflect hope and spark change. Remembering how far we’ll go and how far we came

It propels us to dedicate ourselves to the pillar of progression. Following those aspirations that broke down walls, opened doors, and cracked ceilings


Wanda Strunk, University of Iowa, (2018)

The Ladder

It was one thing to be born
The lowest rung of the ladder
It was another to go out
Acquire the skills
Buy the materials
Build the ladder
Then start the climb

Others went well on their way
Me still struggling with
My rickety unsure ladder
All I could afford

Why did I ever construct this ladder?
When my feet were firmly planted on the ground to begin with
What did I want to see after I built it?

I know now.

I built it
To see beyond it
Elusive Find

Empty I search
Through likes and shares and follows; of images
Of bombs and slums and toy-less Christmases
For something I used to know so well
Hope has a wandering eye and a way for leaving
Many nights he creeps from my bed
Leaving only a warm imprint of where he used to lay
Hardship doesn't care to discriminate
But justice does
Only numbers for those deemed unworthy of being named
We sit in cold rooms
Black faces, wrinkled, reminiscent of ancestral lashings
Black wrists with impressions of metal cuffs still visible
There I lay my soul down, dry, thirsting for hope
“Beautiful day today isn't it, Miss?”
A Social Work Student’s Litany Against Policy Class  
(Inspired by Frank Herbert’s, Litany Against Fear)

I must not fear policy.  
Fear of policy is the change-killer.  
Fear of policy is the little-death of social justice,  
The ruination of big ideas.  
I will face my fear of policy.  
Iron-clad statutes will not stop me-  
Neither will naysayers or mighty lobbyists.  
Policy will pass over me and through me  
And toughen my will.  
And when the fear of policy is gone,  
I shall be an advocate, a force,  
An agent of change,  
A social worker.
Social Work, Who Are You?

Social work, who are you? Are you a science? Are you a grand challenge? Are you a professor, preparing for classes late at night? Or a student new to the wonders of interpersonal practice, Gestalt to activity therapy.
Social work, who are you? Are you Flint? Are you communities longing for equality, equity and justice? Are you a microcosm of people who just want to make the world a better place, where practice meets research, and research meets practice.
Social work, who are you? Are you political structures stifling those who need you? Or are you the practitioner fighting to improve policies and systems that benefit the most?
Social work, you seem to be ever evolving, practically and rigorously rising to meet the many ‘grand challenges’ for and with communities who need you. The road may be long, but you continue to prove that progress is made, one step, one fight at a time.
Social work. Clearly, you are macro, mezzo, micro and more.
Explosions

I wasn’t speaking beyond what was expected
A human is still waiting though it’s unknown to me
I was not following the weather
And it was warming up
A pressure on earth

Maybe my sunken eyes could have helped you from a distance
The action of me telling you I care
Humanity moves quickly causing friction among all
And it was warming up
A pressure on her

When I look up, you seem at ease at how restless I’ve become
I should have forced you to stay when the sun was surging from the ground
Life was slashed; it rested on frail intentions
It was warming up
A pressure on me
Repress

What is left unseen
Is no less of a reality
Cold shivers from under a bridge
A full house, an empty fridge
Take a pill to numb the pain
Anything to make me feel sane
Cover up the bruise, put on a smile
Portray my life as the perfect profile
Can’t eat, I need to fit in
Suicide will help it all end
Another needle, another stick
Remember what is unseen is easy to forget
So don’t be another turned head
What if it were your very own kid
Or the way that life had chosen you to live
A Toast to Memories

He is a descendant of Dionysus, he proclaims, as he raises his elixir for the day’s grief to his quivering lips. He smiles, *Even Gods dance with demons*. And in his tango, Vice is a temptress. OneTwoStep. *Drink*. She takes the lead. His night, like the evening sky, becomes pitch black.

The dawn is a canvas, blending begonia, violet, and cerulean hues, but his blurred vision beholds the brown slop before him. As the sun rises to console the earth in its warmth he, too, rises from the parquet with no recollections of the previous night. But the body remembers -- its scars remain below the surface.

He stumbles haphazardly into bed, grasping for something real. The other side of the mattress is sunken, worn. Vacant. The space is haunted by the woman he used to love, whose mortality was tested too soon. So he drowns Emptiness and Longing until they visit with the sunlight once again.
He tells me he loves me.
He tells me he needs me, so why does he beat me?
He tells me he loves me.
He tells me he needs me, so why does he beat me?
He tells me it will never happen again.
He tells me to forgive him, so why do I believe him?
The story of my life.
The story of regret, for the one who will never forget.
Through the Social Worker's Eyes

My eyes have seen a lot.
Babies who were forgot
and placed in societies blind spot.
I have seen more than most.
Adults with no family and no place to coast
their lives become a faded memory - a ghost.
They are the no names and for most of the world
they are classified as all same.
Added to the pile of forgotten notes
with little help and even less hope.
But this is not a poem about the forgotten man
instead it's a lyrical embrace to use as a helping hand.
Because I am a social worker, I can see you in full view.
I am a social worker and together we will pursue.
I am a social worker and I am here for you!
Thriving

Despairing
Withdrawn
Disabled
Surviving

Support

Hopeful
Communing
Enabled
Thriving
Take This Night
A deep dark night
Filled with fright
Trying to avoid the fights
Where you can't even see the light
Take away this night

Moving forward tonight
Fighting for your rights
Making this night not filled of fright
Take this night

Survivors fight for their rights
To get through every night
Being able to finally see the light
Where they are not in fright
Take these nights
Always fight for that beautiful light
Social Workers: Agents of Change

We step in where we’re needed, but sometimes we are called.
   No matter how many times it happens,
      We’ll catch you if you fall.
We’re not just all talk, sometimes we have to take action.
Despite the situation, we do it in a professional fashion.
Our goal isn’t to rescue you, but to teach you how to rescue you.
   We advocate, we broker and we mediate.
   We lobby, we enable and we facilitate.
No, we’re not superheroes, but we are Agents of Change!
   Doing our best to ensure everyone’s well-being,
      To us, that isn’t strange.
   People wonder why we do it,
      A thankless job they say.
Using all of our powers for good,
   That’s the social worker way!
Leanna Olitsky, Rhode Island College, 2016

Old Age Is Not A Disease (a found poem)

Old age is not a disease,
but challenge we might.
Who will get to know us?

Talk about the lessons, she called to request.
"It's worth investing the time."
Families who depend on us,
the need keeps growing.

Mentor.
Friend.
Confidante.

Frozen in time,
for a generation that will never forget.
“i can’t recognize myself in a mirror anymore”
he has been weathering the years that begin to
pluck a few hairs here, to push yielding skin to dunes -
to valleys; he’s grown a mustache to look like his favorite
television star. a cowboy, all dust and arid earth.
“i don’t think i’ll make it to 30” he says
“i’d give it a fifty-fifty chance.” he’s daring me to ...
to what? he says there’s no beauty in the world,
curses his parents for cursing him with this

outside the trees are coated in ice and glimmer
in the morning sun just so - melting; i can’t show him
the joyful chorus of water. “it’s all dead” he’ll say - no rain
in his desert. but he turns from the mirror, walks
(as he always does) by the window as he leaves.
i hope that by the time he passes it’s spring
Human Blossoms

Some people like to paint beautiful masterpieces that move millions. Others like to create melodies that delight our Senses. Some people like to garden, To grow, and to harvest the gifts of our earth. But me, I am in love with human beings in all their uniqueness.

Fascinated by the way each person has their own strengths, their own beauty. Ever curious by what has broken a heart, and even more so, what has mended it. Truly captivated by what makes someone angry and where that stems from. Deeply fascinated by an individual’s distinct experiences and the perspectives it creates.

And as I work with people, building a bond between myself and another. Supporting them as they process and remove the debris of unresolved emotion. What is left behind when the dirt is cleared is a person in their unique wholeness.

To humbly witness a human returning to themselves is a masterpiece of life. And to play but a small part in the blossoming of someone’s potential is the highest honor.

We have but one life to be who we truly are; boldly and authentically. Above all else, this is the fundamental goal I have for all those I work with.
Where Does Help Start?

I worry about you being under the influence of life's invisible crashing waves.

I am a Social Worker.

I care about your:
+ well-being; seeing you thrive and live a meaningful life based on your positive values.
+ potential and seeing you overcome internal and external oppressions.
+ business and life dreams.

I am a Social Worker:
+ present to listen to your cares and fears.
+ ready to connect you to resources to shape new realities.

I want to help you be above the influence: healthy, happy and whole - coping resiliently - a buoy.

I am a Social Worker:
who will express empathy and support you non-judgmentally.

When you're ready - help starts here - with me: your Social Worker.
Forever

House to house
Family to family
I'll never know how long it'll last
So, I won't let myself get attached
I just want that forever.
Someone to give me affection;
Not look at me like I was the problem.
I did everything right
Stayed out of trouble
But that didn't stop the pain at night.
Next time, look at me
And not judge my past
I didn't cause my situation.
My past will always be my past
I just want a family that will last.
Open door
Tissue I have tissue
I can't stop the pain but I can help with the issues
pencils pens paper
if she doesn't want to talk about it you can't make her
children smile and parents lie
now would you please explain the bruises Burns and swollen eyes
too many kids fall through the cracks
too many pleas go unspoken
it's sad it's true but these are the facts which is why my door's always open
my hours are long my work is hard but I always have time to spare
so please come through my Open Door
Hello I'm a social worker and I care.
Crying for Help

she colors her arms
Big Bold stripes of sharpie,
smelly markers.
reds and blues but mostly black.
poems of the names of the boy she’s crushing on,
and his best friend, and the girl from english class.

By lunchtime the names
jump from her arm and run across the room
and sit across the cafeteria
uglyuglyuglyugly, they cry
and form a jury of her peers

She stands on trial

you need only look to the table
where the girl tattoos herself with love songs

it’s uglyuglyugly, she says,
but not as ugly as what’s beneath.
On The Social Work Revolution

Waiting for the revolution
When justice will be had for all

The radical history of social work is overlooked
Swept under the rug
From settlement houses
To community organizing
The micro is separated from the macro
As if they were never one

The individual struggle
Is a collective struggle
Together, we fight
Together, we rise against oppression
In all its varied forms
Together, we can build a movement
Another social work is possible
Daddy

A girl I was, a woman I am
You hurt me so
the screaming
the sulking
the occasional slapping
Now you're old and finally kind
Mama is gone
I could have left
instead I embrace you
It's so much better, wouldn't you say?

"So", said the worker,
"We're done for the day."
Fear breaths ambivalence.
Wrong actions falsely acquainted with excusable
also despicable, and the just fall into the hands of filth.
Cut no more cheap tricks, they hurt.
Turn the past, move forward.
No more indifference.
Instead, succumb to social change.
Speak up and unite the world.
Love will disparate,
clean oxygen pours out pure and fresh.
Fireworks need fire to ignite. Fire needs oxygen.
We all breathe the same air.
Inhale and exhale the same elements.
People are fireworks.
Spectacular colors that light up the earth.
Social Work: Past and Present

Profession roots in Hull House, one of Jane Addams’ creations, Social Work has changed to include more than just Caucasians.

Though called into question by Abraham Flexner in 1915, Social Work stands strong as a profession, just like a marine.

With the NASW Code of Ethics as our guide, We will give hope to the hopeless and dignity to the undignified.

We act as beacons of hope and change in a world that sometimes loses it way. And we try to clean up the darkness, like pollution to the E.P.A.

We chose this profession, even though the pay may be low, For we believe that “men are born to succeed, not to fail,” as written by Henry David Thoreau.

Our mission is to enhance human well-being and help meet people meet needs, But we often do more.

We help people succeed.
Beginnings

I began,
not when I gasped my first breath in
a poverty-stricken, rural parish,
but eons ago,
before time began.

And in that moment
when I took my first breath,
a sound emitted
with remnants of the utterance of Eve,
the giggle of the sex workers of Pompeii,
the wailing of the sharecroppers of Colonial Virginia.

I will always be clothed in the fabric of my ancestors.
The perpetual voice of
my children’s children’s children’s children
will cradle the threads of my first breath.