

THE HOPE AND THE WOUND
A LIGHTHOUSE WRITE TO CONNECT ANTHOLOGY

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Cover design by Brooklyn Alladice.

Artist Statement:

There is a contrast at play here. The hands of the dead hold flowers for the living that still stand, despite the pain of past disappointments. Tears might fall heavy from their faces but not for sadness, but of an exhausted hope. We are pained with the burden of the past, but look at the desecrated hands with a desire for things to change for the future. Their flowers are an offering to those that still stand and continue to fight in remembrance of the past warriors.

With editorial assistance from Angelica Dilorio, Brissa Mendoza, and Negean Mohi.

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Introduction

Service is a term repeatedly applied to humanitarian concepts, but scarcely is it scrutinized past a fleeting ubiquitous level; if it is everywhere, what makes it unique? Every day, frontline service workers absorb the suffering and secondhand trauma from the population's most vulnerable, yet those who dedicate their lives to heal wounds often have no space to process these invisible scars—but those blights accumulate regardless. Vicarious trauma settles into the body as a low hum of hypervigilance, into the mind as recurring images without permission, and into the spirit as a quiet numbness. This literary anthology began with the question, “*Where in your body do you feel stress?*” with the belief that literature offers the answer to the unseen emotional weight carried by those who serve.

With an extensive background in education and classroom behavior management, I developed a scaffolded curriculum designed not as clinical therapy but as a literary intervention, offering a writer's tools to non-writers guiding the transformation of unbearable experience into shaped language. The workshop was developed into three phases: Creating Space, Fostering Self-Expression, and Integration and Community. Understanding the heavy undertaking of this task, my initial goal was to promote an inclusive atmosphere to ease into comfort from the overburdened and empower their space to express themselves as they acculturated into a larger community.

Across four workshop sections, we studied how the simplism of sensory language can evoke memory, how metaphor can hold what logic cannot, how shifting from first to third person creates necessary distance, how the line break or stanza break can mimic the body's need to pause, exhale, and resume. Every tool we practiced served the same purpose: to give vicarious trauma a syntax, a rhythm, a container. We found hope from our wounds.

Through the 8-week process, we learned how to give and receive feedback on our creative work, and this is where we accentuated our individual growth. We led discussions with tenderness instead of precision, and learned how to transition from a room of strangers to a circle of witnesses. There is an alchemy to peer feedback in trauma-informed spaces, one that refuses to demand empathy but recognizes it in the many forms it presents. It derives a closeness from strangers without the need to extract the emotions from them. Together, we confronted the slow work of naming what is often so unspeakable.

This anthology is the harvest of that labor. Every piece inside was a fragment of memory pieced together with tired hands, and submitted by a frontline service worker who completed the curriculum and chose to share their work publicly. You will find no tidy resolutions here; no healing arcs forced into couplets. Instead you will find precise, honest writing that capitulates the beauty that bleeds from the experience of empathy. These are not stories about trauma. These are literary acts

from inside its aftermath, using craft to carve out room to breathe. Each work of prose or poetry is a reflective map of emotions previously without language.

This collection is for those who share in this work, who answer the call, who wipe away the tears and blood, who advocate for the voiceless. May you all feel seen in a world that does not demand your story in return. For general readers, may you open a doorway into a reality hidden from your own perspective. Consider this anthology an invitation to understand the actual costs of providing to your fellow human. Literary art does not erase vicarious trauma, but the healing act of writing can transform it from a solitary contextual weight into a familiar and relatable weightless text. Create something you can set down, revise, and return to with new eyes. This is not a cure. It is companionship.

The work in this anthology would not be possible without the hard work of applying for and being rewarded funding and grants. In 2023, after receiving a request for workshops from Urban Peak and Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Lighthouse Writers Workshop hosted a series of one-off writing workshops for direct service professionals in the Denver metro area to help reduce staff feelings of burnout and vicarious trauma. After seeing the impact and need for these kinds of workshops, Lighthouse applied for and received the Arts in Society grant in 2025 to host four 8-week Write to Connect cohorts. Thanks to the generosity of Arts in Society, Lighthouse has been able to support

over 40 direct service staff members from more than 10 different social service organizations in the Denver Metro area in 2025 and 2026. Without the trust of the Arts in Society funders, the voices of heroes would remain unsung in a time that truly needs a chorus of their cacophony.

Negean Mohi

Write to Connect Instructor & Lighthouse Faculty Member

COURTNEY FISCHER

Hope is Stubborn

A collection of short pieces

She sits across the messy office desk from me. The lights are bright and an unnatural color that does not lend itself to any kind of warmth. The case manager who brought her to the appointment lingers in the back, feet away from her client and unwilling to sit down. The manager's keys jingle softly in her hand as she fidgets and paces. Her eyes dart between me and her client. The office windows and doors are closed to offer the client privacy as the interview starts. It is not long before I understand the case manager's distance and reservation. As the client begins to recite her painful story, the malodor of stale urine fills the small office. The woman talks of sleeping on the streets for years. She opens up about her fear of shelters, of people, of men... She wipes a tear from her cheek, leaving a streak through her otherwise soiled face. I reach for a bottle of essential oils on the desk next to me as discreetly as I can. She doesn't notice me; her retelling of her horrors have transported her away from this office and our meeting. Her tear-filled eyes are looking somewhere much more distant than I can see. I dab some of the oil on my fingers and bring them to my face. Just below my nose, the lavender swirls together with the lingering smell of urine, only giving a slight reprieve. I complete the interview, shaking hands with the new resident and the case manager who brought her. I hand her linens and a towel, and after showing her to her room, she draws herself

a bath. She states she does not remember the last time she was able to take a real bath. I hand her the bottle of lavender oil and encourage her to enjoy it.

#

Bottles clink against each other as her feet shuffle through the beginning of another day. The bottles are empty, yet their weight slows the movement of her shaky steps. She's tired. Her body aches with needle points of pain and mounting regrets. The light from outside of the apartment forces its way through the cracks around her door, guiding her through the shadow of what her life has become. The dull knocking begins to reverberate in her head as she gets closer to the door. Her hands shaking from the morning tremors as she grips the cool metal doorknob. She hovers, hesitating for a moment, and takes a deep breath of the stale air before turning and pulling. The light outside burns her eyes and dilates her weary pupils. It takes longer than usual for her vision to focus and handle the accosting brightness. Her mother stands there, the light now surrounding her like a warm halo.

"DeeDee..." Her mother's soft voice dances into her ears and straight to her heart. "Dee, baby, I want you to come back home with me."

She feels the darkness of her old life pressing on her back from behind. Her mother takes her still-trembling hand and gently pulls her out into the warm sunlight and into a brighter future.

#

We are the people who notice the little things, from the flutter of a
bee's wings to the hidden tears.

We are the people who will not stand by and watch as others are
obliterated.

We are the people who see the wholeness of others: the good, the bad
and the gut-wrenchingly painful.

We are the people who stretch themselves to surround the vulnerable
in a cloak of love and mercy.

We are the people who can be the easel for the beautiful portraits of
our fellow humans.

We are the people who are desperate to make others feel comfortable
because our own skin feels entangled with barbed wire.

Hope is a bright curse that illuminates the lurking darkness and helps
us navigate the pain.

Hope is a desperate animal with powerful jaws, clenching on and
thrashing wildly.

Hope is a bright curse, those who choose to hold on to it end up with
burns.

Hope is a desperate animal, injured but lurking through the jungle,
refusing to die.

Hope can show in the biggest ways like starting a beautiful family in a broken world. Hope can also be in the smallest acts such as waking up today when you wanted to die last night. Hope is like a person's soul. It begins as a bright beautiful promise in our core. But life has a way of dulling it, defiling it. Some people lose it altogether, and some people sell it for something tangible and cheap. You should treat your hope like it's your soul. Protect it and never let it go.

Hope is stubborn.

ANNELISE FLEMING

Handed Down Thunderstorm

Grief is a handed down thunderstorm. When someone dies their absence is passed along. The thunderstorm is felt by everyone. You are drenched, it is loud, scary and it takes over everything you wanted to do that day. The thunder is so loud that it shakes you to your bones. The thunderstorm doesn't stop with just you though. It gets handed down to each person you talk to about your person's absence. The storm is handed down and stays over your head every birthday you have without them. The storm is handed down to dates that used to have no meaning and are now singlehandedly one of the worst days of your life, forecasting what the day will look like. The thunderstorm is waiting. Waiting to pour. Waiting to stomp and thrash. Waiting to throw you around. And all you can do is prepare for the storm with the forecast given to you. Are you going to wear a jacket, use an umbrella or let it pour all on and around you? You can do everything you can to prepare but you know it's going to happen without your consent for the day you want to have. You want to control it but the weather systems come with their own agenda for the day. You're out and about and suddenly a song comes on shuffle or on the radio and it brings you right back to your person. The jacket, the umbrella, all do nothing to stop the downpour that is happening in your heart. Thrashing you around, overwhelmingly forcing you to focus on nothing but the thunderstorm, once again being handed down to you and once again

something you didn't ask for. No concern for the moment you were having. No concern for what you wanted to do that day. Sunshine and clear skies are gone now and dark gray clouds with a downpour are now there for your unwanted change of plans.

NATHAN FLORY

The container is my mind

I think, my narratives,
thought patterns, and fears.
Though more and more I realize,
it is my skin, the membranes of each
of my cells:
my very self contained.

I have carried
the weight of my unspoken truth,
my deepest heart,
my self;
denied, deferred it,
shamed it,
have been too scared to speak it.

When I ruminate upon the weight I hold,
my fractures show,
despondency sets in, doubt,
the core of my being is heavy.

Heavy. Grieving.

At this stage,
what could have been

If I had not been too scared to

But I must give myself credit,
I took chances,
eked out tiny bits of my truth,
extended my hand, my heart
to let another start to feel its weight
but they wouldn't hold on,
never took it in.

They kept my truth at a distance;
I kept myself within the
boundaries they drew

around me.

'm continuing to crack,
you see,
it's been so long I'm about to
burst
in a big bang or a
big crunch
who's to say?
If this is it, let's hope for a bubble universe
or a big bounce.

I am wobbling on the edge of a shelf:
it's a long way to the hard reality
of the ground,
but I cannot wait to shatter.

LILY MONSOUR

Wilted

Once there was a girl who gathered twigs and stones to place in her fairy garden. A girl whose hair covered her eyes with giddy tendrils and whose body leaped like a butterfly dancing between flowers. One day, this girl decided to play a game of hide-and-seek by herself (which isn't that productive of a game to play alone) but the girl didn't mind: she liked looking for things that were actually nowhere to be found and hiding from things that had no real intention of finding her. The girl decided to hide beneath a table, her body tucked—knees in towards her chest. While hiding, the girl began to hear her parents arguing as they entered the room. She stayed silent as she heard her father scream and curse, her mother cry and pace beside the table. The girl felt like she should move, but she also knew that this was not a great time to be found. Curious (and stubborn) the girl continued to listen. Her father slurred words the girl didn't quite understand yet at her age. Her mother eventually stopped crying and instead took up the tone of anger. The actual words spoken between the two parents all felt fuzzy to the girl, but their feelings were as clear to the girl as the dew droplets that landed in her fairy garden. Her mother eventually left the room, not in a stomp but like a wilted flower drooping its head down after a hot summer day. Once her mother had completely slumped her way out of the room, the girl's father chuckled and bent down beneath the table, making direct eye-contact with the girl. He told the girl to get up

and go get ready for dinner. The girl wondered when and how her father had realized that she was in the room, and why he did not ask her to leave sooner. “Show’s over,” the father said to the girl while gesturing his hands like a flight attendant pointing to the exit signs in case of emergency. The girl snapped out of her muddleheaded state and slowly left the room—another flower defeated by the heat. She’d been found after all, left to wonder where her mother had gone hiding.

Body and Bugs

The day's weight lands in my back,
collapsing me to the ground
like a higher being's removed my
vertebrae in one seamless pull,
leaving only the innards
of some bug.

The pain doesn't seem to end there,
the ground initiates a decomposition of the body,
electric blood pulsating in waves,
convulsing of limbs—extruding up towards the sky,
then collapsed
back down towards the chest.

I seize and shake
while I fight to revive my body,
begging to let go,
begging to not let go.

It feels like there is nothing else
except a somatic shadow of pain suffocating my being
and then

I begin to levitate.
My essence outside of myself,

floating in the cumulonimbus clouds
staring down at my own
 boneless, buggy body
fetused into the soil.

Roots begin to weave themselves
over my once inhabited skin sack, tucking it
into the Earth
for one final sleep.

The rest of me continues to wander,
exploring the warm sky
spineless,
 painless,
 and so very free.

KIRBY PETERSON

The Invention of Broad Shoulders

When

I carry her

pain my

legs go limp.

My head sinks

into the pillow,

my body crumbles

beneath the sheets.

I carry her

heavy heart

beneath my ribs, it fills

the void, the imprint,

of my borrowed

vitals. My barely conscious

brain whispers, *close*
your eyes, while
every overtaxed organ's
words drown beneath
my mind's alluring
lullaby. My shoulders
contract, my jaw

tightens, my spine
folds, softens, and
sinks in-
to dormant muscles,
themselves caught
between crooked

spasms. My arm-
s and legs that

strained only
moments earlier are
now the last
untouched dish
at the community potluck,
the radioactive-
colored gelatin
that only shakes
when provoked. *Close*

your eyes,
my tempting skull
matter repeats
from a far off
place at the
back of my

head, the front of
my awareness.

A gentle numbing tucks
me into a familiar
discomfort, a
proven path
leading away
from healing.

And suddenly
I am numb. I am
gone. The avoidance
succeeds and my
body is not my
own, my daydreams

become spots
on a map
of temporary
 temptations,
 delusions
of bliss.

And just
like that
another day
becomes night,
another feeling
denied. Another
healer succumbs to
the suicidal martyrdom
of saviorism. Just

like that a man denies

the boy inside

his true feelings.

ORION STEPHENSON

Glass Half Full

It is small enough to fit in a child's hands, yet too large to hold alone.
It carries the complaints of those who do not know the burdens you
bear, and your tears.

A basket of bottomless sighs, the perfect accompaniment to
contentment.

It always seems to suffice, or never quite satisfy the spirit.

It's all about perspective, ya see? Me?

I'm just glad to have seen it at all before you dropped it.

The Weight We Carry

I will remember the peculiarly 'cold' warmth of the client's hug.
Although their bones are stiff, they
find the dexterity to contort their arms around my shoulders. Their
gentle sobs echo through
my ears, tears of joy. This is the first time since meeting them that the
stench of alcohol isn't
making the perilless journey from their mouth to my nose. Their skin
is the clearest it's ever
been, eyes no longer the color of bile. The taste of salt is now present
on my lips. I'm crying too.

GHOST

I see why they call it the witching hour—I'm haunted by thoughts of you.

That Word Again

Hope is a blanket and binge-watching Netflix when snow is in the forecast.

It is a spiritual north, faith the compass that points the way.

Hope is a four-letter word worth a thousand more, that means life or death for so many.

It is a rallying cry for a better tomorrow, a rebuke of things that no longer serve a meaningful purpose.

Hope, to me, is the understanding of why ‘they’ say that it is always darkest before the dawn.

A Fleeting Thought

A cold, yet sunny winter's day spent contemplating the neighbors
grass... There's no need to go
over there, but the question remains. An imprint staining the fabric of
your everyday; every
waking moment full of reminders that love don't live here anymore.
The house is vacant, and
so, remains a vessel for hopes and dreams—once broken, now whole.
Rebirth. A new beginning
in the form of a feeling that cannot quite be explained.

Still, I am sorry you bought that gown for nothing.

Calling In

My colleagues have taught me that we are a unique type of people.
While there are many, we
are rare. We do not do thankless work – our praise is sung in Heaven.
They taught me that if we
don't do it, then who will bring love to those who have been told that
they are unlovable? We
are not always cheerful, but we care. I have learned that community is
currency, and we are
addressing a substantial deficit—never make a promise that can't be
kept. A lesson my
colleagues taught me is that the best way to honor a memory is to be
better than I was
'Yesterday.'

IZRA ROSARIO

Yet ANOTHER Letter for Change

To whom it may concern—

I write to you today regarding the devastated and utterly putrid experience of the global majority today. We are angry, we are exhausted, we are sick, and we are still anticipating more. Existing in these bodies that have persecution of those that came before written into their DNA should make us prepared, make us sturdier stock than the generation before. Genetically modified to weather the spread of disease, putridity, and drought, sure, but these factors are growing much faster, much stronger than we can ever be prepared for.

Dear reader, I ask you to confront your role in this turmoil. In what ways have you failed your fellow humans? How many times have you chosen complicity for the sake of comfort? Silence for the sake of personal sanity? Why is it that the sustenance of your status quo comes at the expense of your neighbors suffering? Do you not process our suffering as deserved? Is the guaranteed plight of generations truly a sacrifice at your altar of willful ignorance?

This letter is not the first of its kind. This letter exists on the shoulders of Assata Shakur, George Jackson, Dee Brown, Malcolm X, Ida B. Wells, Octavia Butler, James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis,

Toni Morrison, and your ever idolized Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This letter exists as another contribution to the anthology of desperate, righteous anger. A hymn for mercy. A declaration of humanity.

I crave ash and soot. I seek rebuilding. Tearing this fetid world to its basic components. Nuclear realignment, reassignment. A new beginning. One where the violence born from love manhandles that violence born of fear. I call upon a rapture of society at large for the downtrodden and defeated.

To whom It may Concern, I challenge you to give a damn about someone other than yourself. To love that which you have been programmed to see as your enemy.

Ragefully yours,
Someone you will forget

KAYLA SCHENKELBERG

Coming Home From a Tough Day

The door opens. The door closes.

One warm body fills the space.

A pseudo-leather bag gently drops to the floor.

The lights are off,

but a screen's electric glow illuminates a tired face.

Soon after, a tinny ring fills the quiet.

"Hello," says the voice of someone familiar.

"Hello," echoes the voice of someone infinitely more familiar.

Two voices fill the air. Footsteps crease the carpet,
pad across tiles, and sink into couch cushions.

One lap around, then another, and another.

Three words more are exchanged
before the false light is extinguished.

The bag moves from the floor to a bench.

A lamp flickers on.

The air moves.

A breath in. A breath out.

Not-Good-Energy Seeds

The vessel waits empty in the shade. Large enough for a juvenile tree,
with a squared-off rim

topping its bulbous base. Terracotta, thick-walled and rough, hides
behind speckled off-white

paint. Some of it has chipped off and fallen away to reveal my natural
clay. The work begins.

With a fwumph shhhh the soil falls steadily into my embrace. A dusty
cloud rises from the

growing pile of dark dirt, but I don't cough, and I don't mind. There's
enough to fill up only half

of me. From deep inside, I draw out five seeds. Their glow weakly
illuminates me from the inside

until they sink below a layer of soil. With a huff, I grate against the
ground, my heavy burden

sinking slightly into the earth. Then I find sunlight. There is a water
hose curled haphazardly on

the ground; soon a stream flows and creates a wet soil scent. But when
that water touches the

seeds, there is a violent spark. The vessel cracks and breaks apart.

Yesterday's burden is lighter to me as I step toward tomorrow.

Like a rock that keeps my thin, fluttering hope from floating away,

I am grounded by the knowledge that others share in my struggles.

For Healing

We all do this work
in hopes of healing
old scars of our own.

Impassioned hearts that
beat
to the
drum of rebellion
against apathy,
and deny that we
are really meant to
walk this life alone.

So, I write and hope.
For myself, for you.

ROLF STAVIG

Sound for Vision

The weight lands in my gut.
It feels like a gift from beyond,
A life of its own aware of my ill-fitting pregnancy.
The Doula of trouble slipped out the back door
Leaving the screen door with a bang and
Reverberating with the decreased oscillations of its wave,
Barely enough to disturb the fly buzz with a breeze or
Wave of the hand over old food or in the Summer grown grass
The duty of dog shit.

The Dharma of Durgha at war with souls of grass hoppers
Living their one season, rubbing their cricket parts together,
Their bug mandibles and dividing zygote where 2 becomes 4 and 8 and
sixteen and
I am giving birth again like the light of deep time — a thousand million
of us
In descent mistaking our likeness for thinking alike,
Feeling like one of the numbers up to infinity and back and therefore
never coming back.
My bonds are cut, my baby goes everywhere, astral by the river
Reflecting on junk in the water's veins,
The hymns of our demise and beautiful remains, placenta-like, sinking,

Licking our warm sticky fur
Sure with the ancestors populating a more glittering future
Like dawn on the water
Having delivered a long night to its form both vague and sure,
Crying a new river, a new sun running up against sums and slipping
Back in the pools of inertia,
Or unearthed ourselves like eye goo amniotic of the new born
Not yet able to focus, mistaking sound for vision.

Wet in the Mud

Tempestuous beast beats the wind and tarantula, Caligula
 Passing for Tuesday, passing on this rumple for that bumble
 Where the bees flea the burnt bush and smoldered fire
 Darkens her look like eye shadow, snack food, beveling of
 Whole neighborhoods, louses, tempura, bravado pushing
 Into the line, making the claim like a pack of drunks
 Humping up their leader for the treachery of coward hearts
 And blood stains and woman has to be a saint, even after work,
 Moving through the cars of the lot at the supermarket.

They have to put out spoils of food for the change,
 The decomposition from one to another and another
 Where the chicken roast in cellophane is barely warm
 But still it sweats those around like the galley or butchery or
 Processing plant, crematoria of our stomachs,
 Lines, disaffection 2:00 am to 3:00
 In a parking lot behind the store eating.

We are the people who sing,
 Talk of eyes, mouths, around the table with each other,
 Oblong, rotund at the foot and head
 Where the obelisk is ground planted and heads rest as clouds in the sky.
 Try and try and try
 Sleeping all the time.

How to go underwater, understand the tiles in the lap pool

While sun is somewhere.
Outside is a little like inside if you swim long enough
And begin again and again like laps,
Pushing off hands from the side to rest and float back up.
We are all in this together, in our lanes, in our cars,
At the time tables and in suits of hair,
Pretending for a while that bodies don't exist,
That the organization is a whole and
That we never use the drain or panic button emergency exit
With its red "X" and push bar.
We soldier on like a child amputee looking to ski,
Right here in Colorado where the water freezes and falls from the sky.

Goggles for our day dreaming eyes,
Sun protection for the naked skinny dipping in the mind
Like a new color between mauve and pumpernickel
And earth which is all colors and as the water finds its level, come
Spring,
We take deep first drinks and breathe between each stroke
Like ants collecting salt on their exoskeleton joints.

The chirp of one in the grasp,
Being saved or sinking into the hill,
As the bees into the hive,
The aquifer of nations,
The dry skin of our many red ant neighbors and

The army ants and the jungle path
By nature turned, by the limits of the pool tracing our way back,

Back through phylogeny of fishes and mouth parts,
Hard shells and mating displays.

Back and back again over white tiles and black
To the beaches and bleached shells,
The liberation and poverty sloughed like words
Back into their primordial heaps,
Their underwater of meaning
Making us embarrassed to stand dripping on the side,
Cold enough, spent in a towel,
Dressed, ready to go home.

Turn of the motor, the key,
The respiration like a carburetor,
The dog body,
Indian mind opened as tsunami
Once from the sea swamped, covered the woods,
Made way for the egg of the world to crack her star face
And for the yolk to form the blood spot,
The beating heart of a chicken,
Primordial, big as a horse.
Birth of what we brought, now,
Still gestating with the future

Shrinking as the past grows and pushes.
 It's a breech baby and the boards of the table top,
 The feathers of Toucan plumage and tonnage and grass.

The hay sheaves and rain of baby drops
 With midwife muse growing, roasted.

Hope, dream, Field of Dreams,
 Arkansas, Iowa.
 What the corn says when people are drinking beer,
 Pulling up in trucks, comparing notes.
 The iteration starts again, need not, want not,
 Catch the flag around merry go round again
 For first and last turning,
 Into each other, rubbing noses with the cold and
 The car windshield and the ice shifting, the plot swelling
 As the river pulls, down in the grease of the grass of hope.

I suppose people have died here for the break neck speed of the
 continent,
 Of the spine and rump come out at birth,
 Upside down as a history of these states being,
 Of feeling the capture of style,
 The release of birds,
 The pleasing of unseemly sentiments.
 What is begun someday is done.

Someone is trailing the wagon and the child and the red hope,
The bright red dream of dawn and fire and water and
A home for the little clay idol and our bare toes,
Unlike our idol's, still wiggle wet in the mud.

NINA WOODMAN

How does that make you feel?

Your eyes are puffy.

You fight to pull your hoodie down

hiding from me

from this office

from our conversation.

This converted closet is haunted by a faint smell of cigarette smoke.

It mingles with the diffused peppermint essential oils.

I wonder if it is bothering you

but I'm too afraid to ask.

My eyes search the wall frantically as I attempt a reassuring smile.

How will I get through this?

You tower over me with your hand on the doorknob,

threatening to leave, again.

I doubt you meant it,

I'm too afraid to ask.

Your back slams against the wall

I watch your descent to the dusty vinyl floor.

I fight the urge to hug you.

I don't know what to do

I'm afraid.

Despite your scowl,

I can tell you are too.

I don't have the words to reassure you,
they likely don't exist.

But I will sit here
with you
with our fear.

I hope it's enough to keep you here,
even if just for another minute.

CONTRIBUTORS

COURTNEY FISCHER

Courtney Fischer is a Colorado native and loves giving to her community. She has been in human services working with Denver's unhoused neighbors for 14 years. She is currently managing the Irving Street Women's Residence through Volunteers of America Colorado.

ANNELISE FLEMING

Annelise is currently a case manager at a local nonprofit in the Denver area helping unhoused people find stability after they become housed through the Rapid Rehousing Program with the City and County of Denver. Writing has always been something Annelise has enjoyed and really found her love for it while attending Colorado State University as a Political Science and Ethnic Studies Major student. Born and raised in Colorado, her experience as a woman of color has always been more easily understood by leaning on those who she intentionally chooses to share community with and where she can also learn more about herself. Being able to dive deep into social issues and finding ways to understand and engage in the process has always been something that she is passionate about, even as a kid. The "Write to Connect" program really brought this passion back to life and allowed her to write about various life experiences in a way that had been previously ignored in writing. In her spare time, Annelise loves to listen to music and attend shows, which she will be doing so much more of this summer, while also spending time with her friends and family.

NATHAN FLORY

Nathan Flory (he/him) lives in Denver, CO and works as a resource navigator at the Denver Public Library, connecting library customers to basic needs items, essential benefits, and service providers in the community. He enjoys playing ultimate frisbee, (trying to) keep his succulents alive, and being cozy with his cat, Goja.

LILY MONSOUR**KIRBY PETERSON**

Kirby is a bilingual (English and Spanish) social worker with a passion for working with immigrants and migrants. As a passionate advocate of equity in public schools, he loves empowering diverse students of all ages to be the best version of themselves. When he's not using his skills in service of vulnerable and minoritized peoples, he enjoys thrifting for more books than he has space for and exploring the world through creative media, especially two-dimensional art and writing.

ORION STEPHENSON**IZRA ROSARIO****KAYLA SCHENKELBERG**

Kayla Schenkelberg earned her undergraduate degree in psychology and has since been employed at various non-profit organizations. Both stressful and rewarding in turn, she has spent the last seven years working with employees of a homelessness service provider, youngsters

at an autism center, and adolescents at a residential treatment facility. The individuals she met at each workplace have lived uniquely inspiring stories, often born from tragic circumstances. In meeting so many resilient humans, Kayla likes to search for common threads of truth among the beliefs that guide others' life paths. After attending the 'Write to Connect' program through Lighthouse Writers Workshop, Kayla wrote about parts of her experiences and musings. She plans to continue writing amateur speculative poetry, ideally while relaxing in a hammock on a nice day.

ROLF STAVIG

Rolf Stavig, LCSW is a clinical social worker who co-facilitates "Writing Through Cancer" a monthly online support group for cancer patients and their loved ones, in coordination with writer and Lighthouse instructor Theresa Rozul Knowles. Rolf has been an oncology social worker for twelve years at the University of Colorado Hospital, Anschutz Cancer Center, UCHHealth, Aurora. As a social worker, Rolf is interested in drawing forth creativity and the arts to help people dealing with cancer for themselves or a loved one.

NINA WOODMAN

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ARTS IN SOCIETY