

# REFLECTIONS ON CHOOSING SOCIAL WORK AS MY PROFESSION

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*In this deeply personal narrative, the author reflects back on her thirty-four year career and considers the choice she made to go into the social work profession.*

In the spring of 2004, I attended the NASW Region H Awards Dinner. The ceremony honored the Social Worker of the Year, an outstanding agency, and a number of our department's first and second year MSW students whose commitment to the ideals of the profession had led them to provide extraordinary service to clients and the broader community. Increasingly moved by the impassioned, and often poignant, comments of the award recipients, many with whom I shared professional and personal relationships, I found myself reflecting on the choice I had made years before to enter the profession and surrender my love for writing and the humanities to that of an avocation. Indeed, my active participation in the social, political, and cultural revolution of the sixties had led me to my career choice, seeing the social work profession as one that could contribute to the impetus for change by its focus on individual and social justice. Later, in the early morning hours, unable to sleep due to the emotions stirred by the event, I distilled my reflections on my 34 years in the profession in the following lines:

*I would have liked to spend my days  
drunk with moments when words fly off the page  
hoping to catch those images that rush in tidal waves of words;  
to play with words, tossing them about the page in changing form and sequence,  
words as clay, forming figures who were once only phantoms in my mind's eye;  
to conjure visions of persons long since gone,  
their touch and smell buried deep in places hidden and denied within me.  
Their voices beckon me to give them breath again,  
a chance to sing the songs they once sang, and those they never chanced to sing.  
I ache with the weight of their stories,  
filled up until the press makes it hard to breathe;  
I cannot feel my own breath; I can only feel theirs.*

*But the world did not give me this luxury,  
to trifle with words was to trivialize the lives of others;  
the phantoms' voices were silenced by the cries of those whose pain was palpable.  
There were no doldrums.  
Time pressed forward grinding bones to make a mulch of justice.  
Need and sickness devoured my words.  
The call to act, to teach, to care sounded over the voices of the storytellers  
who shrank into muted shadows once again.*

*There is no regret;  
I would choose again to give, to fight,  
to share the pieces of time I would have liked to hoard.  
I would do it all again,  
except, perhaps,  
I would have danced more often.*

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