

Every Monday and Wednesday afternoon, at 1PM Eastern Standard Time, our poetry and literature class meets on the third floor of a grand old house in Holyoke, Massachusetts, once home to Elizabeth Towne, an influential writer, editor, and publisher. A young mother with little formal education, Towne, born in 1865, became an advocate for women's suffrage and an independent thinker who published *The Nautilus*, a journal with an international reach. Today, the same structure houses The Care Center, an educational and cultural nonprofit with its own rich and vibrant history of literary arts programming for young mothers working towards completing their degrees. Inspired by Towne, *Nautilus II*, an anthology of our young writers' work has been published for over two decades – part of a vital tradition to celebrate and publish the women who come through this space to study, to learn, to graduate, and to carry forth the literary arts, through the past, present, and future.

In these old living and dining rooms of Towne's 19th-century home, over one hundred years later, young mothers from their own diverse histories come to attain their high school equivalency credentials and complete their college degrees. Here, we provide young mothers and their families with programming that spans from early childhood education to college completion, with arts and athletics programming available daily, for students to continue their education with active choices and resources, while also moving toward greater self knowledge and economic self sufficiency.

We also aim to provide our students with what we see as invaluable: the time and space to read, to discover, to write. Within these upper floor drawing rooms, now brimming with poetry, literature classes, and writing workshops, we read poems, novels, short stories, biographies, and nonfiction. We write, and edit, and read and write some more. We have a devoted library on the poetry floor in my little office, likely once a closet, where students, teachers, visiting Poet Laureates, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winners, alongside celebrated poets and writers, all stop to linger and appreciate the immense work of a diverse and wondrous library, from old classics to new contemporaries.

Through the often incomprehensible news of our times, the isolation of grief, the immense joys and pains of motherhood, we fortify ourselves with the delicate yet potent force of what poetry and literature can and will do. It invites us here, to sit still, to listen, to enrich the vital spaces, stories, and moments that are so often overlooked, to uncover what is inherently ours: the ability to connect, to imagine, to articulate, and to acquire a deeper awareness and knowledge of ourselves and the world in which we live. It is in this time, in this space, where the world can become a little more comprehensible, a little lighter, and where a collection of rich new work is created.

We hope you enjoy the work, and celebrate our first featured authors of The Care Center & The Field Office's Weight of Bees Chapbook. For the first time, our young writers are honored with the publication of their own debut poetry collections. And, it is in these vital spaces and times where poetry and literature is honed, and indeed something to both treasure and share.

~ Charlene Choi, Editor and Poetry Coordinator