This poetry anthology was published by Literature for All of Us, a nationally recognized and award-winning literary arts organization.

Literature for All of Us uses books and writing to facilitate circles of connection, healing and growth in the face of social inequity. By inviting participants to explore the transformative power of their own voices, we help build resilience. We open worlds by opening books.

“How We Got Here” is a compilation of poems written by the Chicago Women in Trades Spring Cohort in book groups conducted in collaboration with Chicago Women in Trades located at 2444 W 16th St in Chicago, IL.

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“I’m Can’t Quite Remember My Dreams”
We at Literature For All of Us extend our deepest thanks and appreciation to the entire staff of Chicago Women in Trades.

Our special thanks to Jayne Vellinga—Executive Director, Linda Hannah—Program Director, and to all of the instructors and mentors for the Technical Opportunities Program (TOP).

The women in our book groups have benefited from reading and discussing great literature and poetry. Some of the poems in this collection were inspired by work from the following writers: Susan Eisenberg, Yesika Salgado, Cupcake Brown, Pat Cull and more.

It has been a pleasure for us to work with the women in the Technical Opportunities Program at Chicago Women in Trades during this unprecedented time in our collective history. We find you all inspirational, courageous, bold, and determined. We wish you the best of luck as you move forward with your illustrious careers in the trades!

haydee souffrant and Faith Rice
Book Group Leaders
To Linda,

Your loving spirit and kindness touched me. Upon meeting you I knew that you were a powerful spirit. I immediately felt "home" in your presence. You celebrated my graduation from grad school with me, you celebrated my first child with me, and you celebrated my decision to change careers. I will never forget the support you offered even when you were fighting your own fight. Thank you for inspiring me and encouraging me. I will always hold on to the "safe" I feel with you.

Faith Rice
Book Group Leader

____________

Dear Linda,

Words can’t express the energy and courage you possess. Unbeknownst to you, CWIT was my very first book group with Literature for All of Us; your open heart, love for our organization, and especially your love for each TOP and CWIT student was immediately felt and needed. Thank you for knowing the power of sharing yourself honestly and for sharing it with me. CWIT won’t be the same without you, and that’s a good thing.

Hope you continue to find your perfect sandal weather!

haydee souffrant
Book Group Leader
Elsie Arroyo
Robin Berryman
Brenda Betts
Libby Bower
Alison Brehn
Ciera Clark
Crystal Cook
Andrea Cruz
Angelica Dandrea
Julie Dixon
Olguiemar Freyre
Rebecca Greene
RavenSymone’ Hairston
Grace Haywood
Angelica Iglesias
Marcella Jackson
Katherine Martinez Torres
Cherokee McMurray
Jillian Morehouse
Megan Myers
Pachon Robinson
Katherine Rubinas
Cindy Ruiz
Patricia “Patti” Swanson
Veronica Torres
Griselda Venegas-Murgula
Mariel Vera
Tempestt Wesley
Kala Wheeler
Allison Wojcik
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*Book Group Leader: haydee souffrant*

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Robin Berryman
I know what it’s like to come into this world too early, (or right on time).

I know the smell of bait & gas & pizza on a hot breezy day. I know how to carry my body from here to there, stomping and singing the whole way. I know how to evacuate an airplane in 90 seconds or less.

Open seat belts, get out, leave everything. And I know how to nest, to cozy, to clean, to build. Wherever, with whomever, always with me.
Julie Dixon
Finding Out
By Julie Dixon

When I found out that I wasn’t in trouble for hitting puberty at 7.
The moment I saw the blood on the toilet seat at school was devastating.
I instantly cleaned it up put the tissue down there because no matter how many times
I wiped it would not stop bleeding, then I went back to class.
Hell I was only in second grade— learning 2 x 2= 4
but the thought of telling Mrs. Campbell (with the really big yardstick)
did not sound appealing at all.
I didn’t want my hand whacked but why was this happening?
What did I do? It had to be because I was already wearing a training bra
and the boys would not stop touching my No No spots.
My momma was gonna be angry and I could already see the disappointment on daddy’s face,
I could never be his little girl anymore.
I Know I Know I Know
By Julie Dixon

I know who I am
I know of the people who tried to change me.

I know the place where I lost myself—
I know home.

I know the men who broke me
I know the dome.

I know and miss White Hen Pantry.
I know where I’m going
because I know where I’ve been.
Rebecca Greene
Remembering a New York Kid
By Rebecca Greene

The way it feels to be scared to breath
The Bronx Botanical Garden
The Bronx Zoo, but not as well
How to make beer
How to follow a protocol, even when I don’t understand it
My sisters’ laughter from across the room
My father’s disappointment in me, in himself,
seeping into everything
That we three are his absolute favorite people in the whole world,
even when he can’t stand us
The delicious joy of making one decision
and never questioning it—
that I will never feel that again
How to make perfect chocolate chip cookies
I have no sense of direction, but have no trouble reading a map

Much less than I did.
Rebirth
By Rebecca Greene

Figuring it out was like
Rebirth.
My world broke open and I
took in new air for the first time
In 15 years.

The cage I had built out of my fear
and guilt
and shame

Shattered.
I did not dismantle it slowly
I did not pull down each brick
I did not pry apart a single bar

But with this new information
I could no longer fit inside

And now I stand
Anemic, pale, undernourished

But free.
Grace Haywood
What I Know From Memory
By Grace Haywood

his apartment

the smell of him after a shower

his eyes

the freckles on his back

the curls in his hair

his voice

the bump from where he broke his nose

the way he sings

how he dances

the way it feels

when he holds me
Anonymous
I am From
By Anonymous

the mango tree in my great-grandmother’s yard
the bare dirty mattress where I lost my virginity
the glow in the dark stars I stared at the first time I thought I wanted to die.
the dorms on State and Randolph
the studio classes on Columbus Dr where I made my art.
the rooftop on 18th street where I met him
that corner on 63rd where he made me feel scared
children are the greatest gifts and the biggest monsters
My grandmother’s words of praise and something else
the fear of liking women even though I know I do.
Jillian Morehouse
I know West Olympia

I know the 2-block radius around my apt
I know what Thelma
is crying for
I know my obsessive tendencies

I know my avoidant persona
The Plot Twist Is...
By Jillian Morehouse

The plot twist is
I never expected to be out to my dad.

The plot twist is I ignored it for so long

that one day…
It surfaced and consumed me

For six months until

plot twist…

I built the courage

to press SEND.
Pachon Robinson
A List of Firsts and other Things
By Pachon Robinson

1. First daycare was lollypop
2. Snowbunnies
3. Grandmother & Grandfather just me 7yrs.
4. Mom was a single parent
5. Brother born 7yrs after me.
6. Powell Academy
7. Rainbow Beach
8. Great friends then High School
9. Dad passed the day I got accepted to culinary school
10. Rough roads to life
11. Birth of my daughter
12. 4yrs of learning to be a mom
13. Still working at university
14. Don’t sit in your car
Cindy “Sin” Ruiz
Things I'll Never Forget
By Cindy “Sin” Ruiz

The *pompa* being opened in the summer w/ wooden planks and tires on 49th & Justine.

My neighbor Barbara’s bbq chicken she made on her grill outside on her porch because her gas got cut off.

My grandma’s house where I was abused. My uncle’s house where I was abused again.

The weird house on 48th & Hoyne. St. Miguel Middle School.

Juarez High School. Pilsen.

They didn’t ID me at Ganados liquor on 47th.

The 2011 blizzard and walking really high in it. Pilsen again.
I should’ve listened to my past,

Carefully replaying all the times
   I cried and hurt the first time.

But it’s ok.

I am stronger now.
   I won’t allow you to hurt me any longer.

I’ll allow myself to feel this pain,

   But I won’t let it overstay its welcome.

I know this time,
   it will be you who hurts

I am not seeking you,
   I will not look for you

I do not want to find you

The Plot Twist.
Griselda Vengas-Murgula
Things I Learned
By Griseld Venegas-Murgula

1. The “bad” neighborhoods
2. Favoritism in a job
3. Ass beatings
4. Domestic violence on my mom
5. Immigration status
6. Heartbreak
7. Being lied to
8. Relying on GPS even though I’ve lived here for 26+ years
9. Loving someone who isn’t ready to commit
10. Depression and anxiety
11. When my dad would drive drunk and “threatened” to crash on purpose
12. Coming out
13. How confused I am in life
14. Struggles of growing up undocumented
15. Smell of urine around CTA
16. When people don’t flush the toilet
17. Choking from drinking too fast, going down the wrong pipe
18. Drinking from the water house and hating the taste but still doing it
Tempestt Wesley
I’m Glad I Knew
By Tempestt Wesley

The smell of fried chicken
   The homework assignment I hated
      When I went to dance practice on Tuesday

Dress rehearsal by the actual recital
   The scary movie that still frightens me
      SAT prep

Summers at the park district
   Meeting friends at Rainbow skating rink
      Taking a limo to Navy Pier

High School dances
   Favorite movie theater in downtown Chicago
      College visit my senior year of high school

Getting home sick after my 2nd week of college

Go Huskies…
   What I will be when I grow up

Wildfire restaurant key pie martinis
   “Pull over to this alley”.
I Never Expected, But I Do
By Tempestt Wesley

My life changed for the good
I was expecting to live life by striving for a career & traveling.

As I was living life, I met him.
I had no real interest, he became interesting.

We began dating & the rest is still occurring.

As the saying goes “Things come when you least expect it.”

A dinner date
  turned into a concert date
  which turned into “Hey, want to go to Vegas?”

A trip to Vegas turned into “Maybe he does like me” to making it official to
  “I think I’m pregnant but I’ll wait until I come back from Miami.”

9 months pass & baby has arrived.
2 months of being a mother
  Than a proposal in front of my family & friends.

  A year later we’re in Jamaica, saying “I Do!”
Allison Wojcik
Staying Curious
By Allison Wojcik

What I know changes every 5-10 years.
In my childhood, what is now 1% being bungalows—

Catholic Schools before magnet schools existed.
In my tiers/selective enrollment schools.

The burnout from them pushing me from
math & science to art.

Art changing in popularity and marketability.
Burnout from that pushing me to go to college.

College ending up being a waste.
Current me knowing I don’t want a desk job.

Music, movies and books being a crutch through it all.
Now hobbies and interests leading to new directions.

New directions leading to a career.
What I Know
By Brenda Betts

I know me.
    I know us.

I know more about blacks than the half of us.
I stand on behalf of us.
    I know us.

I know we fuss
    but loving as much.

I know we tough
    but we’ll protect the crust
    I know us.
I’ll show us.

We deserves us.

Who know us?
    I know us.
Walking Away
By Brenda Betts

Walking away from you
meant not speaking your name
Walking away from you
meant regaining my strength
Walking away from you
meant free
Walking away from you
meant I can talk freely
about you!
Walking away is so cool.
Alison Brehn
I walked away
because I wasn’t a priority.
I walked away...
even though I still loved him.

In the end it was the best decision ever
even though it was so hard.
I Know Simple Things
By Alison Brehn

Rural backroads
Mud pies
Let’s play dress up
Kitten purrs and whiskers
I am stronger than I know
All that sparkles
Holy crap I’m not actually bad at math
Paint it blue
Never try to catch a falling knife
You gotta breathe
Ciera Clark
Thirteen Things
by Ciera Clark

1. The fire on Exchange Ave.
2. Prairie Courts
3. Childhood memories of no technology
4. McDonald’s
5. Fights on top of fights
6. Graduation Day
7. Super Mall
8. Pulaski + Archer
9. Welfare + Public Aid
10. Michael Reese Hospital
11. Met my best friend
13. Mercy Hospital
14. Baby boy
I Walked When I Knew
by Ciera Clark

I walked away because I knew it was time.
I walked away
when I knew I would be able to forgive you
for what you had done.

Walking away from you
meant I loved my kids more
than I loved you.

I walked away with the knowledge
of refusing to be put in another situation
that was similar to the first one.

I walked away the day I realized
your lies were very clear.
I walked away
even though a part of me
still loved you.
Olguiemar Freyre
I walked away from a relationship because it was detrimental to my growth to her growth.

I walked away with the knowledge that I was deserving of more.
What I Know Is Not From Jeopardy
by Olguíemar Freyre

I question my intelligence
and wonder what I know;
if my reality is mine to own;
if my intelligence is mine to own.

I know the fastest route
to get from one side of the city to the next
but I can’t name any British royalty.

Why would I?

I’ve never wanted to be a Jeopardy champ.
I value that I know
the cheapest gas stations,
the best grocery stores,
the safest bars,

but a brain that is unsafe to its owner
is unsafe with the knowledge inside it.
Marcella Jackson
I walked away because I knew it was time
I walked away when I knew it wasn’t getting better
Walking away from you meant severing family
I walked away to save myself
I walked away for me
Directions of Knowing
by Marcella Jackson

Silence
Chaos → Confusion → Fights
Sadness → Losses
Strength → Outward
Quiet strength? Inward
Love
Family
Self
God → Always
Self Love → Self-ish?

   Nope.
What I Know
by Cherokee McMurray

• I know…
• September 30th, 2013
• Where I gave birth
• Choosing life for my Child 1
• Planning Child 2
• 26th St. Bridgeport
• Moving on
• Moving up
• That call
• The last time
• Never grieving
• My journey
• My story

• The End of it all
The First Last Time
by Cherokee McMurray

When I walked away I didn’t know it yet
but I was 2 weeks pregnant
I took a punch to the face
for the last time
I took verbal, physical, emotional and financial abuse
for the last time.
I walked away
because she deserved better
I walked away
because she was abused.
Megan Meyers
What I Know
by Megan Meyers

Fourth Grade MacArthur Elementary

Foster Care, Ms. Shirley

Campagna Academy
9 mile near hub pool

St. Anthony’s, broken mind
and all facial bones

133rd and Taft

St. Anthony’s loss of 1st
Son 04/13/2014

Tears of Joy, birth of
Cameron Robert Hall
4/15/2015

Home 2910 W. 73rd Pl

St. Anthony’s
Birth of James Demond Hall
08/08/2018
Katherine Rubinas
I Know Driveways
by Katherine “Katie” Rubinas

the gravel driveway where my sister
  pulled me in a wagon
the brown painted street signs I watched my mom make
the pavilion where I learned to rollerblade to N’SYNC
the classroom by an ocean
  where no one knew my name
the Uhaul where I found my Easter basket
the slap of oven-like heat, stealing my breath
the girls on my block who couldn’t play right now
the boys who threw eggs and
  spray painted “LESBIAN” on the driveway
the sky, dark and clear
  the disconnect
Stationed
by Katherine “Katie” Rubinas

I walked away even though I had nowhere to go
$100 bought me a bus ticket
42 hours later
was a “fresh start”
I slept in the park
My shoes got stolen

A month later,
I returned to the bus station

“I’m a teenage runaway”
Magic words.

They made a call.

No one picked up.
Patricia “Patti” Swanson
Transit
by Patricia “Patti” Swanson

1. things only your grandpa remembers
2. the lake, in all weather
3. every nice bathroom in the loop you can access without buying anything
4. crying on the blue line, and brown line, and red
5. the kindness of strangers
6. the way slush seeps into the hole in your boot
7. the grocery stores that sell maseca para tamales
8. which Metra line goes due north
9. which Metra line goes due south
10. who you find on transit on Sundays at 6am
11. the best place to get brunch
12. and the best place to eat when you have just $5
13. all the spots that radiate warmth
14. and the ones I avoid because they are cold
15. how to get home
Mariel Vera
Click Here For Plot Twist
by Dasharee Williams

I never expected
to find his wife’s Facebook,
I didn’t see it coming,
but he was
“happily”...married.
The Night Before the Plot Twisted
by Kala Wheeler

I never expected him to show up at my job 70 miles away.
I didn’t see it coming,

The night before work we had an argument.
The argument was not with him,
it was with his child’s mother.
We did not say mean words
she just revealed a lot of truth.
I lived 70+ miles away at school.
The truths she told hurt bad
and I ended up blocking him and deleting his number.
The next day at work,
I walked by my manager to go outside for my break.
My car had balloons attached to the rearview mirrors.
A huge teddy bear on the window w/roses in its arms.

I was so hurt the night before.
I Walked Away
by Kala Wheeler

My first relationship
I walked away because
he became very toxic.
I walked away
when he snatched my keys out of the car
and my phone from my ear.
Walking away from him
meant that I would be away
from the growing negativity and toxicity.
I walked away
knowing that I will one day
feel better
and not like I felt
on that snowy day (Christmas Eve).
I walked away
even though
I did not really want to.
I’m happy I did.
“It is only possible to live happily ever after on a day-to-day basis.”

-Margaret Bonnano