

## **The Voyage Forward** *a Poetry Duet by Colleen Machut*

*Written for a collaboration between Live Forever Project and Telling the Full History Grant,  
2022/2023*

*The following poem is based on interviews with Sheboygan native Deb Sabol-Williams about her experiences interviewing family members who lived during the time of the historic women's rights movement in Wisconsin. This poem presents the perspectives of two different Sheboygan women during the time period of the women's rights/suffragist movement. It was written as part of the Telling the Full History grant.*

### **Section 1 - Agda: an immigrant focused on preserving culture and history**

I must not force foot to pavement  
when priority is beaten breathless  
by pangs that ricochet through bellies,  
and preoccupy minds with each visceral bellow...

...when pale arms,  
thin and trembling,  
reach to be nourished,  
but love alone is not enough  
to soften the edges  
of protruding ribs  
and fill the emptiness of mouths  
with portions equal to hunger.

...when I baptize my home with bristle-brush water,  
rinsing filth from the faces of plates  
to fortify my family  
against contamination,  
which lurks in the shadows of cupboards  
and looms with tendril fingers  
over scant supplies of sustenance.

...when hands fold and heads bow  
and prayers are mumbled in the darkness,  
requesting guidance  
as we combine with a new world,  
teaching our youth to preserve  
the twists and turns of our native words  
on the curves of their tongues  
and in the cadence of their songs,  
singing as our ancestors have sung.

I must not force foot to pavement,  
when our history must be heard;  
when our story is not done...

### **Section 2 - Ida: a strong women's rights advocate**

I must force foot to pavement  
when spirits need leading  
and fires need lighting in the souls of daughters  
who reject dismissal and decapitate domination;  
who nourish the flame of liberation  
without the need for validation.

...when pale arms,  
thin and trembling,  
reach for signs  
and hold them high,  
for love alone is not enough  
to soften the edges  
of lines of oppression  
and fill the emptiness of mouths  
with songs of equality.

...when I am called to claw with bristling spine,  
scratching filth from the faces of power,  
and fortify hearts against slant-eyed placation  
which silently sifts through society's foundation,  
laughing as it lingers  
in the cracks of words and phrases.

...when hands hold and heads lift  
and prayers are welded with gifts of plenty  
to galvanize words into actions  
whose aims will someday be won.

I must force foot to pavement  
when our future can be forged;  
when our story has just begun.

### **Section 3 (Ida and Agda)**

*Both (Staggered - Agda starts first):* I must teach

*Agda:* my children

*Ida:* the next generation

*Agda:* to re-read our words

*Ida:* to re-write the words

*Ida:* and fight

*Both:* for a sense of self.

*Agda:* I want us to survive.

*Ida:* I want more than to survive.

*Agda:* So with my eyes dry,

*Ida:* So with my eyes lit,

*Agda:* congratulating my calluses,

*Ida:* thanking my thickened skin,

*Both:* I voyage forward.