PREFACE

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The first time we read about the genocide in Darfur we were sitting in our warm apartment drinking tea. That day, the *New York Times* reported on the wide-scale injustices that were occurring in Sudan, specifically the massive numbers of soldiers who were raping women: mothers, daughters, sisters. We stopped drinking our tea.

We were two graduate students with little in our bank account, but we felt a deep desire to help change this situation. As Communication and Creative Writing students, what could we contribute to a world crisis that at first glance appeared completely removed from our everyday life? We signed petitions, made phone calls, donated what we could, and cast our vote. And yet our spirits sought more. But what? Other than the actions we had already taken, we felt powerless.

We had (and still have) no money. We had (and still have) no fame. We had (and still have) no influence in the national media. We have yet to be called to appear on *Larry King Live*, *Good Morning America*, or *Oprah*.

As we considered this dilemma, we reviewed our passions: writing, reading, volunteering, connecting with others, and bringing people together to make an impact. We asked ourselves, *What do the combination of these passions suggest we do?*

A response rose up in us. We could create an anthology that raises funds to support ending the genocide in Darfur. It would bring together some of the writers and activists whose words and work have ignited our own lives. They could sing as one chorus—though each would reveal a different avenue for creating change through risk taking.

Immediately after committing to the project, our minds were flooded with questions that had the potential to paralyze our efforts: *What if we attempt this and fail? What if no one is interested in contributing? What if everyone thinks this is an unworthy idea? What will happen if these words fall on apathetic ears?* These fears that we rehearse in the quiet places of our lives become mantras for every decision we make. We may not share them in the classrooms of the university, the corner offices of corporate enterprises, or glowing kitchens on winter evenings. Yet we allow them control over our lives.

Despite our fear, we wanted to see this anthology come to life. We wanted to live out what poet Theodore Roethke wrote: “I learn by going where I have to go.” Through this risk, we discovered authentic power.

We wrote to authors, poets, professors, social activists, and others and asked them to share their insights on fear and risk. All of our contributors responded with enthusiasm. You now hold in your hands the result.

In bringing together these voices, we desired to create two layers of meaning: first, to inspire change and reignite passion within the reader and, second, to make the book itself have a tangible impact on the world. But can singing a song—however profound or moving—do this? There’s no guarantee, but it’s worth the risk.

Therefore, the royalties from this anthology will be given to the Save Darfur Coalition. In Darfur, Sudan, more than 600,000 people to date have been killed, mutilated, or raped (as stated in the powerful book *Not on Our Watch* by John Prendergast and Don Cheadle). According to the Save Darfur Coalition’s website, “In all, about 2.3 million Darfuris have fled their homes and communities and now reside in a network of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Darfur, with over 200,000 more living in refugee camps in Chad.” Change is vital. Now.

As George Saunders so eloquently and forcefully claims in the foreword to this volume, words have power to acknowledge or hide reality. The ways in which we choose to recognize or ignore everyday truth define who we are as people to our family, to our community, to our country, and to our world.

The essays in *Dedicated to the People of Darfur* explore how we can fight fear by taking risks through our words and actions. In its own way, each essay refuses to support a culture that welcomes apathy and ignorance.

In “One Man’s Risk,” Peter Turchi contemplates what might seem to be the smallest of all decisions, the tiniest challenge: he and his family are hiking, and they must cross a small river. Turchi sees himself standing on one of the rocks, and he must make a slight leap to reach the next. Instead of making the jump right away, he stops; he considers; he thinks about what might happen were he to slip and fall. Would his head pound one of the smooth, hardened entities below? Would there be blood? This pause freezes him and forces him to consider *why*. Why does danger creep into us so subtly only to command so wildly?

In “Life Drawings,” Beth Alvarado explores the nature of how our writing demands that we forego the consequences of what may come from it. Alvarado is highly vulnerable as she explores her own relationships and those of other authors; how does each writer push past the censor of *shouldn’t* to create the real people she wants to—needs to—create in order to bring forth the art demanded of her? Risking recognition from family or friends, the writer somehow must put pen to paper to form the souls that people her story, regardless of outward reaction.

Phillip Lopate navigates the fears we live with every day, those that join us constantly, like the old coins that fill our pockets. In “Real Risks” he explores the fear of death. Will we have accomplished what was necessary for us, what was demanded of us, before we leave this world? Will others ensure that our names live on?

Other essayists explore the ways in which our interests, cultures, and political machines facilitate danger: Sarah Stone examines politics and how we might authentically become involved; Andrew Greig describes a mountain-climbing expedition; Gail Dines pries open the corporate culture and its perpetuation of abuse against women; John Robinson grills the educational apparatus that often crushes our students in the public school system; Tom Grimes documents a writer’s depression; Debra Spark explores the many faces of fear; Robert Boswell’s words burn with the redemptive power of escaping from drugs.

Ultimately, this anthology shows us the fears we face and the risks we might take to push past our fears into action. Some may believe the market on risk has been cornered by daredevils; but this book offers a fresh perspective, exploring risk as a necessary component of the journey toward authentic transformation of ourselves and our culture.

In short, these essays offer a way in which to rescue the fire of risk from the rain of the status quo. In a world where passions are persistently extinguished, may these words ignite a belief in humanity, a belief in life.