A Manifesto for Living
by Hannah Brencher

Here’s to the ones who were never normal. Never conforming. Never able to sink into the soles of a follower.

Here’s to the ones who were told to stop. To give up. To quit trying. To shove themselves into a little box because the world never needed their arms stretched out wide.

Here’s to the ones who refused to listen. To the negatives. To the naysayers. To pessimists and the procrastinators.

Here’s to the ones who believe in Away. And Going. And Newness within Newness. And a world made to wash us and move us and sculpt us and change us. And the courage it takes to believe in all those things.

Here’s to the ones who have uncovered the recovery from darkness. Who have cried on bathroom floors. Who have found pockets of strength in cracks in the sidewalk. Who have declared new days and brighter days and lovelier days than this.

Here’s the ones who say, “I’ve moved on” and “I’m stronger now” and “You never completed me. No, that never happened.” Who believe in their wholeness even after breaking. Who believe in Better Than Ever even when the Better Half of them has eyes towards the neon EXIT sign.

Here’s to the ones who stopped trying. To please others. To be perfect. To get smaller. To live in the lines. To color with only the classics of Red and Blue and Green within a lifetime that swoons over Fuchsia and Gold.

Here’s the ones who believe in shoes and stories. Yellow rain boots in any weather to Parade through Puddles of Passion. World Shaking Heels. Who believe in slipping into Sizes Too Big and doing a little walk, a little trot, a little stroll before saying, “I know your story.”

Here’s to the ones who live. Life like a love letter. Like a well-worn pair of leather ballet flats. Like a ferris wheel—spinning, spinning—and all the parts of it touched by great love stories and boys who used to help girls on by the hand.

Here’s to the ones who laugh within the thunder. Cry within the mud. Dance when the bagpipes of sorrow play. Here’s to the ones who hear music, even when the sacred songs of childhood get stuck in the throat, stifled by fear.

Here’s to the ones who wear “joy” like a sweater. Like a wedding dress you wish to wear while eating pancakes and Nutella. Your bare feet on the counter. The train of white
hanging down on the tiles. Laughing, always laughing, as they have another short stack of blueberry.

Here’s to the ones who choose to be relentless. With their purpose. With their ambition. With their desires. With their calling.

Here’s to the ones who know their calling and that it’s greater than a cubicle or a paycheck will ever be. A calling to be a light. To be a lantern. To be a match in the darkness. A flashlight in the power outage. A bright star in the sky of a night that lost hope.

Here’s to the ones who pick up others. Who don’t need to believe in karma to understand “humanity” and how her wrinkles live on in the faces of others. The Sick. The Poor. The Lonely. The Down Trodden.

Here’s to the ones who say “Enough” and “No More.” Who believe in things as crazy as a world where children can feel the fullness of a belly before Sleep. And Dreams. And Peace. Where girls can feel the itch of a school uniform and let their arms grow tired from stacks of beautiful books.

Here’s to the ones who believe. In a tomorrow packed with promise. In conversations where souls undress secrets. In late nights and knees that touch under blankets. In mornings that hold solitude.

In air just gasping and groaning to be sucked in and turned. Into gratitude. Into prayers. Into well wishes that float into the ear lobes of others. Into Hellos and Goodbyes that leave us never the same. Into a life that is thrilling and delicate, like the very first time we saw the elephant tamer dance.

Into something wonderful that will leave us in rocking chairs, in older years, saying out loud, “Here’s to the sweetness that I never could define. Some call it ‘life’, but it has left me too breathless to give it a name.”