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It is 4:00 in the morning, a brisk 37 degrees outside accented with bitter rain. Most of the world remains asleep, even the homeless individuals I am street canvassing to find. I look under thick wool blankets, under freeway overpasses, and peer into dimly lit church breezeways. Eventually, I find a homeless gentleman, quietly wake him, and as his eyes slowly open, the first thing out of his mouth is a reminder of how I am not dressed for the weather. In between his fashion advice, he shares with me his story which weaves his dedicated military service with poor coping skills upon discharge. Little does he know my wake-up call may have changed his life, but little did I know, his humble spirit reconnected me to my passion of restoring hope in strangers.

So often, as a student, it is easy to get caught up in textbook prices, getting into the right classes, and balancing homework due dates with the hours of a part-time job. That day, I was given more than fashion advice; I was given a lesson many are too busy to see—that the human spirit is capable of depths most of the world has never seen. Every individual we talked to that morning was offered a compassionate, understanding, and dignified second chance at rebuilding his or her life. We also offered them a foundation to build the strength we saw in each of them that day through forging new and once unforeseen helping relationships with some of our most vulnerable community members. And for me, that is what social work is really about. Giving chances in a world drained of second chances. It is about more than restoring hope; it is about giving a key to a homeless person who didn't trust the world around him.

For me, my passion is homelessness. For others, it may be LGBTQ advocacy, immigrant education, prostitution, felon reentry, disability awareness, HIV/AIDS education, or mentoring at-risk youth. All these causes (and more) are equally important and are connected with the thread of injustice often seen in each of our communities for various reasons. It is about connecting to our communities, lifting others out of despair and deflated hope, and seeing a genuine smile for the first time when a homeless veteran is handed a key to his new apartment. Social work is the profession of hope for this very reason. There are no scientific formulas, large production companies, or six-figure incomes padded with ample vacation days. The only formula is an uncertain mixture of gratitude, sprinkled with sleepless nights, and irreplaceable and genuine compassion often lost in our overly disconnected society burdened with social media and instant answers. For social workers, there are no instant answers. Restoring hope is an act of blind faith and perfectly timed phone calls, and yes, even instant answers from a collaborative partner. It is about finding the means when you are unsure of the way.