After I said "yes, of course, I will do this service on writing", I panicked a bit because it seems like you might want to know what my process is for writing, as well as why I write.

The truth is, I don’t have much of a process. I have only recently moved from writing on scraps of paper in my car while driving to the safer use of the voice memo function of my phone. I write pretty much the way I speak--too fast, probably in need of a filter, with weird punctuation and peppered with words my mother does not like me to use. If you're looking for writing guidance, I suggest books on process by Stephen King, Annie Dillard and Anne Lamott.

Why I write is easy, friends. First, It is the only form of traditional creative expression I have any natural capacity for. I am not being modest when I tell you, I am not musical in any way, not a good dancer, not a knitter, or a painter. I have stories to illustrate all of this, of course. But those we’ll save for other days.

So, I write. Stephen King has said of writing as craft “a little talent is a good thing to have if you want to be a writer. But the only real requirement is the ability to remember every scar.” That I can do.

I write to express my rage. This one from the Kavanaugh hearings this fall

The heart breaks daily now
There's never time to mend
Separating rage and hurt is pointless
The hot tears mingle, it's all the same

You look at them differently now
Those with robes of respectability
They're the ones to fear
(They always were, some already knew)
They make the law
They are above the law
All that ivy is poison

The ones to save us
Raise hands to attest
Voice quakes
Truth shakes
They stand at the elevator
And release their long hidden pain
To wash over us all
"Look me in the eye"
Part plea, part demand
Believe.
I occasionally write letters, a few terse emails, and the occasional public statement as needed, to use my white privilege in a way that might call attention to injustice and inequity, like this one on behalf of the Carbondale Racial Justice Coalition:

We have read with interest and concern of the recent inter-governement miscommunications and subsequent police department shutdown of an all ages, no alcohol music show at Autopsy store.

We are aware that we are not privy to all the information on this matter, and are basing our comments this evening on recent news reports as well as our experiences as Carbondale community members and observers.

Our concern with how the City departments, including the Carbondale Police Department have handled this recent incident is broader and deeper than the January 25 shutdown of the Autopsy shop owner’s all ages music event.

Our concern is that the City of Carbondale, through it’s staff training, city ordinances and codes, and enforcement of those ordinances and codes is often inconsistent, insensitive, and when fallout occurs over situations such as those with the Autopsy event, uses a bandaid approach to situations rather than looking at these issues through a larger and institutionally corrective lens to address white privilege, racial discrimination and over use of law enforcement.

I write because the personal is political and because as anyone who has ever done issue specific advocacy with busy politicians or bureaucrats knows, stories are more powerful than numbers, so that decision makers can connect policy to people-- like this, from 2012:

I'm grateful for the government "entitlement" programs that helped my family when we needed it: for my Head Start education, my free and reduced school lunches, the food stamps that sometimes bought my family's groceries, for the Pell Grants, Illinois MAP grants federal work study and federally subsidized student loans that helped me through college. I'm grateful that after over 50 years in the low wage work world of retail, my mama collects Social Security that sure isn’t getting her rich, but is keeping her comfortable. I'm grateful that after 65 years of no health care unless she was having a baby, my mama is healthy and goes to the doctor for regular checkups because she has great Medicare insurance. I'm grateful for the memory of twenty years ago on election day, walking to the polls with her, to cast my very first vote for president. We voted for the same person that day. And this morning, mom will walk to her polling place and I to mine. And again we will both vote for the same person. Because we know where we came from. And we know that government, at its very best, is all of us, helping each other along the way.

I write to notice, what it is all too easy not to notice. Usually, when I’m on the road--

With Apologies to Robert Frost
I've learned the back roads, the spurs and blacktops.
Avoiding the Interstate seems more than wise these days.
The kid who lives way out stood me up.
I sucked in irritation. She texted back apologies.
Registered for school, up at the community college.
I praised rather than scolded.
Don't we all need more encouragement?
She sent back a smiley face and grace returned.

I stopped at the donut shop, for a clean bathroom and yes, the sugary fuel too.
I love the old men at Dixie Cream.
Make no mistake, they jaw more than the ladies.
So and so's working again. His wife's managed the finances real good. No hint of judgement.
Life's hard and they've lived it.
The coffee can at the counter gets me every time. Poor people's health care plan. Low tech "Go Fund Me." She has stage 3. You know her, the can says, though I don't. She works at the Walmart and helps out at the basketball concessions for the boosters. She has insurance but the deductible's so high.
I put in my donation and pray and curse all in one breath. Life's hard.
My donut's paid for before I can hear how the old guys will solve North Korea. But I see they've been reading the newspaper, so I leave with a little hope.

I thought of Frost as I took the spur road just out of town, past the surprise of sunflowers.
I'm not sure what makes all the difference.
Next time I'm in, I'll ask the old men at the Dixie Cream.

Sometimes, I just write to remember the tragicomedy of all of this, for posterity and maybe dark humor, that we will get through these MAGA days. Like this newest one:

This month, at the peace vigil, a couple shouted out from their car window, "they need to come here legal." Becca,-Becca who always tries to connect with others to change hearts and minds-shouted back earnestly and kindly, "come talk to us." The couple pulled over a ways and the man got out, shouting and pointing but in no way seeking genuine dialogue yelled "they need to come here legal and pay taxes." I, I who am not as gentle or kind as Becca by a mile, shouted to them in the sweet voice that you know is far from sweet, "God bless you, have a nice day!" The woman then got out of the car and shouted" the devil is coming for you. " And now friends, there was a moment where options were before me. This is now a conceal carry state. These people were angry. The cardboard signs and pacifist inclinations of Peace Coalition vigilers are not exactly bullet proof. I know my smart mouth moves way faster than my middle aged feet could run if I needed to. But that lady threatened me with the devil! Now I was raised up knowing Jesus loves all the little children. And I know that Jesus preached a welcoming gospel of inclusion. I know that while I am far from perfect, the force for good in the universe that I call God is with me and in me and there is not a day of the week when I fear the devil, so before any prudence stopped me, I shouted back without missing a beat "I'm ready!". I should tell you that I knew that was wrong, but I gotta say, it felt really good.

I write to get through hard times. Like now. This one is new. Our theme this month is trust. I trust you all to hold it in confidence, in this sacred space. The night I wrote it was the night I learned of my sister’s cancer diagnosis and I was more afraid than I am now.

The Socks
My sister was diagnosed with cancer today.
Today, the day I am in town to see a folk concert with her.
Today when we have been a little rough with each other lately
Wrestling over old, old wounds and perceived slights
Socks are involved in our latest tiff, if you can believe it
Well, socks and deep childhood baggage and loss and the reverting to childhood family roles
that accompanies any family holiday.

Before we left for dinner and the concert
my sister hugged her daughter, her only child. They are so close and I could physically feel my
niece's fear. My sister said to her, as mothers will "I don't want you to worry. They've caught it
early. I'm going to be okay." I grabbed my niece by the sleeve when her mother was away and I
said "you can worry. it's your mother, you can worry but it will be okay I promise you it will be
okay we've got this I told her and I told myself."

As the music soaks in to me and fear bubbles up inside me, within the perfect acoustics of this
hall, I want to shout at God, you will not take her yet. I am not done with her yet.
Today she has learned she has cancer and I, I am her lifeline and her caregiver and yes we are
holding each other and crying here at the Sheldon in front of all these people as Carrie
Newcomer sings "life's a twinkling, that's for certain but it's such a fine thing" and I sing along
through tears and she, my bossy big sister does not tell me to stop singing, like she usually
would.
The socks said "I don't give a shit", by the way. She says now that they actually are kind of funny.

I write because it’s how I make sense of this messy world. Listen, nothing I’ve written is Letter
from A Birmingham Jail. It’s small stuff, I know that. I write with the most trueness of self and
authenticity and voice that I have, but I know too that what I write and “My voice” is influenced
by other writers, and by the times we live in. I write because it helps me and maybe hopefully
what it does is to make others feel less alone too. That’s our purpose. That’s the work of social
justice and of being fully human. Express ourselves with intention and love, and connect to
others. Do not be afraid of your anger, or your tenderness. That’s the only wisdom I have today.
If you dance, dance this way. If you sing, sing this way. If you bake bread, bake this way. If you
console, console this way. If you fight, fight this way. If you worship, worship this way. Share
your expression with others when it may help. Or when you need help. “Life’s a twinkling, that’s
for certain, but such a fine thing.”