

References

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Poems on Loss,  
Hope and Healing

By Diane H. Schetky. Raleigh, NC: LuLu Enterprises, 2009. 81 pp. \$12.00.

Sigmund Freud, who was a voracious reader, held a special place in his heart for poetry. “Everywhere I go,” Freud ruefully acknowledged, “I find a poet has been there first.”<sup>1</sup> Diane Schetky, one of our most gifted forensic clinicians and ethicists, turns inward in this volume of poems and shares her sturdy, pure perceptions of her world. Poetry requires passion, solitude, and a love of metaphor, all of which are on display in this collection of 51 works.

The poems are grouped into three sections on loss, illness, and hope and healing. Like much fine poetry, the best of these poems move from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, from objects to the emotions that anchor them. Take, for example, this passage from “Still Life with Shaving Brush,” a poem about her father: “Beneath the smooth lid of the bowl/that once held soap/ a wisp of his scent still lingers.” Or from “The Compost Pile,” where the poet describes the spreading of an old friend’s ashes in the garden that she loved: “Diana lies dormant amid the/asparagus, beans and berries/In the end, she had her way and/we will hear more from her/come spring.” The rootedness in understatement

and the importance of place are characteristic of the collection as a whole and lend it a kind of Frostian flavor salted by the Maine coast. A substantial number of her offerings reflect her work with prisoners. There can be beauty in ugliness.

Some years ago I had occasion to reread *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid*. What struck me most forcefully about these epic poems was how clearly they describe the evolution of primitive justice into the canons of civilized law established by the Romans. To see our work in this rich, historical perspective is enormously gratifying. Furthermore, forensic clinicians, by virtue of their involvement in the painful, sometimes tragic, circumstances of their clients’ lives, can profit from the poet’s capacity to penetrate the superficial layers of personality and access the “bedrock” where truth, both literal and emotional, lies. This ability to connect remains a critical skill set of the forensic tool kit and poems such as these can hone that ability. Poetry can sharpen our vision and lend depth to the commonplace.

This book is in some ways an autobiography of a remarkably accomplished but modest woman’s several lives—family, travels, her own struggle with cancer, her stint with prisoners, and her capacity to see the beauty and significance in small things truly seen. One of my favorite poems, “Searching in the Woods,” concludes: “Today, I found my/pileated Woodpecker/not deep in the woods/but close to home.” Indeed, these lovely, honest poems have the power to touch our work and our lives with new views of old sights and enrich our days.

References

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