

They Gave Us Life, Celebrating Mothers, Fathers, & Others in Haiku, ed. by Robert Epstein (2017, Middle Island Press, West Union, W.V.)218 pages, 6 x 9", perfectbound. ISBN : 978-09980732-9-3. \$20 from middleislandpress.com

Reviewed by Tom Clausen

When I first saw this title, *They Gave Us Life*, it occurred to me that there might not be a more fitting subject for poetry and an anthology as this is. Then, when I first held this book and admired the beautiful cover art, "Hand in Hand" by Ron C. Moss it immediately conjured my childhood and the near invincible bond I felt for my own parents and the gift of life they had given me. The cover is an entirely warm inviting invitation to recognize and feel gratitude to our parents for giving us our life. In turn, before I even opened this book, the Buddhist parable about the chances of being born came to mind; "there is a very old blind turtle living at the bottom of the sea and surfacing for air every 100 years, and a wooden cattle-yoke waiting for it among the waves. The likelihood that the turtle pops its head through the hole in the cattle-yoke when surfacing is said to be greater than the likelihood of being reincarnated as a human..."As many humans as there are in the world it is a sacred thought to 'see' each life as the precious miracle that it is. That we arrive in this world through an act of love is certainly the ultimate expression of life and as worthy a quality to honor and celebrate as there might be!

In his introduction to *They Gave Us Life*, editor, Robert Epstein, identifies the loss of his parents as being the inspiration for his latest anthology. Epstein states: "For me, the heart of haiku is healing." The Introduction is exceptional and invaluable in presenting the range of ways poets might write about 'Filial Love.'

This anthology continues Robert Epstein's devotion for writing poetry as a way to work through the grief of loss and into the light of love that he feels for his parents and in recognition of parents everywhere who have given their children the gift of life and so much more. As Epstein notes this anthology collection mostly features poems that celebrate and honor and less about the sometimes troubling and dysfunctional aspects that can unfortunately burden and tangle some relationships with ones parents.

Beside haiku this anthology features tanka, haiga and a few longer poems too. The complexion of relationships with parents is certainly as diverse as the poets writing are and this anthology covers a rewarding range of expression.

If you are not familiar with the other anthologies and books that Robert Epstein has contributed to this is a great introduction and place to discover the succession of his works of love.

Here are a few selections that I found especially poignant and heartfelt.

my mother's diaries
I would have liked
this girl

Seanan Forbes

how mother & daughter
stuck together long after
the Holocaust

Robert Epstein

Afterschool kids
sort themselves
by mothers

Bruce England

Mother's day
one set of footprints
along the beach

William Cullen Jr.

winter afternoon
my father explains
the strength of a pawn

Peter Newton

mama's finger
star by star
the big dipper

Ebba Story

If nothing else, this collection will awaken readers to the breadth and depth of their relationship with their own parents and without doubt inspire thought and feelings for the inevitable love and sacrifices that any parents make to bring new life into the world. Anthologies by nature are a celebration of many and diverse voices gathered to showcase the way we all can add something unique to the whole. This collection wonderfully displays the many ways we relate to our parents and no doubt will promote any reader to contemplate further their own relationship with their parents and hopefully the creation of more poems on this timeless and precious subject.

White Rose, Red Rose by Johnny Baranski and David H. Rosen (2017, Resource Publications, Eugene, OR) 42 pages, 6x9", perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-5326-4442-9. \$5 from amazon.com.

Reviewed by Shelley Baker-Gard

The collection of haiku by Johnny Baranski and David H. Rosen in *White Rose, Red Rose* can perhaps best be understood by imagining two old haiku poets deciding to take a long walk together. One of them (Johnny) has an earworm of a favorite Coltrane jazz tune that he hums along the way. It is this tune that mirrors the improvisational mood of their discussion on what is good and what is not good. As they travel along, some of the stories they share range from their personal experiences to the lives and actions of others. Some of these stories can be symbolized with the "white rose"—acts of altruism and non-violent protests (many members of the White Rose group in Nazi Germany died due to their protests of the Nazi actions toward the Jewish community) (The Language of Flowers, Wikipedia, Feb. 2018). Other tales told on their walk take on a spiritual tone, a love of nature, the divine, and romance—they are the "red rose" stories. As the haiku masters end their journey, they want to remember their path. The result is this exchange of white rose and red rose haiku.

Some of the white rose haiku concern self-sacrifice for good causes as evidenced by Johnny Baranski's time spent in prison as a result of a protest against nuclear weapons. Also remembered is Heather Heyer who recently died while demonstrating against Neo-Nazi hate groups. While in prison Baranski wrote: