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Bless This Child: A Treasury of Poems Quotations and Readings to Celebrate Birth

Edward Searl, compiler
Skinner House Press (November 2005)
Unknown $14.00 (168pp)
978-1-55896-489-1

This little book, as lovely and precious as a violet picked by a young child's entranced fingers, features nearly 200 selections of prose pieces, poems, blessings, and readings gathered to welcome and honor children.

The editor, a Unitarian Universalist minister, has written two previous books, *In Memoriam: A Guide to Modern Funeral and Memorial Services* and *A Place of Your Own*. This volume, part of Searl's forthcoming series, includes selections from writers as diverse as Nelson Mandela, William Blake, Rachel Carson, the gospel of Mark, Lao Tzu, Maya Angelou, and Walt Whitman, as well as passages from more obscure writers.

The book is divided into five sections, each representing some significant aspect of childhood. "Full of Wonder" focuses on children's natural ability to dream, imagine, believe, and experience nature and magic. The late poet Kenneth Patton writes: "The ear of the child is open to all music. / His eyes are open to all arts. / His mind is open to all tongues." Longfellow contributes: "Come to me, O ye children! / And whisper in my ear / What the birds and the winds are singing / In your sunny atmosphere."

The "Here Under My Heart" section articulates the toe-counting moments that new parents experience as they ponder the miraculousness of their baby's existence. "Here, under my heart / you'll keep / till it's time / for us to meet," writes Erica Jong of a pregnant woman's anticipation, and writer Elizabeth Stone elucidates the colossal effect of parental love: "Making the decision to have a child—it's momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body."

In a time when society pays laser-focused attention to parenting, from court cases to advice books, this exquisite volume expresses the spectrum of parental feelings, from awe to anxiety. The selections in "Roots and Wings" address a parent's responsibility to raise an independent person. Kahlil Gibran's famous "Your children are not your children. / They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself" appears, as does the United Nations' *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*.

"All You of the Heavens" asserts that every child is divine, as in this Hasidic proverb: "When a child walks down the road, a company of angels goes before him proclaiming 'Make way for the image of the Holy One.'" The experiences and emotions of every parent are universal, asserts Searl in the book's last chapter, "The Child's Name is All Children." Singer Ysaye Barnwell writes, "For each child that's born, a morning star rises and sings to the universe who we are."

This book provides wonderful meditations and affirmations for all parents, and will be useful for child dedication ceremonies as well as emotional support for those engaged in the world's most difficult and rewarding vocation.

KAREN MCCARTHY (August 18, 2009)

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