



Defining Moments: Times and Happenings That Shape a Life

Joseph E LeBlanc, Jr

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This slim volume of poetry celebrates the ordinary and explores tragedies with sympathetic emotional impacts.

A collection of poetry written over the space of a lifetime, *Defining Moments* presents a picture of a man's personal life with startling honesty and emotion. Joseph LeBlanc's slim volume is undoubtedly worth a read.

Triumph and tragedy play out in the work, revealing the drama of everyday existence through poems that are simultaneously readable and remarkably introspective. This is a collection that showcases not just the quiet desperation of many men, but also the absolute magnificence of what seems an "ordinary" or plain existence, with its domestic strife and self-doubt, its contentment and joy.

Tender portrayals of ordinary lives have been attempted countless times before and often result in sympathetic works. *Defining Moments* succeeds not only by presenting a work one can empathize with, but also by offering a striking portrait of an everyman who approaches hardship with a quiet dignity. LeBlanc chronicles his life, using dated poems to punctuate it. The result is a picture of a man's evolution that involves intimate moments including first meeting his wife and the death of his son.

Decades' worth of introspection evokes an emotional response. In "My Sons" LeBlanc writes:

*See in every life,
no less than in your own,
that to love,
and you will breathe
your final breath as your first,
with the virgin innocence
you now sigh.*

Though such lines may seem trite on the surface, they are usefully juxtaposed to the subsequent losses that befall the poet.

Following shortly after this poem is "Heated Words," written nineteen years after these lines and detailing a brutal shouting match between father and son. "The words were not meant on either side," writes LeBlanc, "but they escaped our lips, not checked soon enough by our hearts." The combination draws forth an understanding of the human experience that is both unique and calculated, presenting life as a blend of memories rather than just a temporal straight line of experience.

However, on the level of poetic composition, the often plainspoken and direct nature with which LeBlanc explores and explains his past can rob the poems of ambiguity, and may inhibit intimate interaction with the text. The effect is one of disengagement, as weak rhymes and structure unintentionally call attention to themselves rather than to the emotions they wish to convey.

Still, the images and emotions of LeBlanc's collection linger after its completion, and one feels this work may be more than the sum of its parts. For all of its technical issues and shortcomings, this is one man putting his soul on display in hopes not only of explaining himself, but also of reaching out to let others know they are not alone in their quiet triumphs and tragedies.

The words of *Defining Moments* may fade from memory, but its sentiments will remain long after.

ALEX FRANKS (February 23, 2016)

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