



Insights

Beth Hall McCandless

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McCandless describes actively turning toward trust and forgiveness in this eclectic collection about chronic illness and abuse.

"Life is not a state of being; it is a process of becoming. This book is about the process," states Beth Hall McCandless on the first page of *Insights*. As the introduction promises, this assorted collection of poems, inspirational phrases, and personal essays invites readers to witness this "process of becoming" as McCandless exposes the struggles and healing she has experienced throughout her life.

McCandless connects with her audience by writing about subjects that are raw and expose her vulnerability. In one of her essays, she describes the horror of living with chronic fatigue, a complex disorder characterized by extreme fatigue, and fibromyalgia, a syndrome associated with widespread musculoskeletal pain, both of which she describes as difficult to diagnose and a challenge to describe to family and friends. McCandless also details her failed relationships and how she survived sexual abuse as a child.

The images in McCandless's prose are startling and distressing and may cause readers to grieve deeply with her. But underneath it all, there is a courageous, almost spiritual feeling to her words, an unspoken understanding that she has moved toward a higher consciousness.

While her prose is thoughtful, McCandless's poetry is filled with language that is nondescriptive and overly simplified. In the poem "Listen," she states, "Listen—to the robin as she sings a morning sonnet, / Listen—to the wind that blows through the trees above. / Listen—to the fullness of contentment at the sunset, / Listen—to the secret voice that tells you how to love." While this is beautiful, the words remain flat on the page and don't elicit unexpected emotions from the reader. Because of this, it feels as if McCandless is a painter who uses only primary colors in a world filled with gorgeous mixed hues.

Although her rhymed poems are not always her best, the exception is "Voice of Experience," where she writes, "Don't be misled by first remarks / Or visions premature, / For nature has a way of twisting / Endings for a cure." Here, McCandless uses unusual figurative language to demonstrate her point, and her poetic voice becomes stronger and more convincing.

Each poem is printed in a different typeface and different size, which proves distracting. Literary collections are often printed in only one typeface so that the words, rather than the visual representation, can carry the emotions.

All in all, McCandless should have skipped the scattered fonts and random quotes strewn between the chapters and poems and focused more on her alarming and intelligent prose. She has a rare ability to represent the struggling and victimized with a soothing yet disquieting calmness.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (September 19, 2013)

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