

Journey through Life with Irene Riot

Irene Riot

Xlibris (Mar 9, 2012)

Softcover \$15.99 (90pp)

978-1-4691-6530-1

Much of Irene Riot's *Journey through Life with Irene Riot* is filled with images of unrequited love and the reality of being a single parent. These heartfelt poems do not shy away from plain language and dark motifs, but at times they are tempered with softer and even joyful themes.

The musicality in Riot's work is ever present. Often the poems sound like they should be read with musical accompaniment because of their internal rhythm. A powerful example of this drumming beat is the poem "Answered Prayer," which includes these lines: "The flow is smooth, before there were turbulent tides / With caution removed, care is allowed to preside." For the most part, the rhyming is strong and the pounding rhythm is one of the book's best attributes.

At times, the imagery in the collection can be slightly banal, with overused language such as "my heart can bleed" and "shelter me from the winds." And by the end of the book, Riot's themes of heartache and longing become repetitive, making the reader hope for a respite from what appears to be the same poem presented over and over again.

The section titled "Irene the Doctor," however, does offer a break from the inner-focused confessional poems that make up the majority of the book. In the poem "Tainted Lotus," Riot retains a personal feel, but she reaches outside of her own thoughts and emotions to describe a patient's story. At the beginning of the poem "Stable Waters," the reader is able to step into the caring role of a physician: "I met a man today and he was feeling sad. His eyes were so dry. He said he had no more tears to shed. His voice was soft. He said he was about to exhaust his last breath. I searched for his pulse. I almost missed it. He said he was about to bleed his life away."

One of the most bizarre elements of the book is Riot's use of family photographs. She has chosen to fill the book with snapshots of herself, her daughter, and her nephew. This choice shifts the tone from a professional book of poems to something like a scrapbook or a journal. That being said, the book is best when read as a cross-section of a woman's life, as a mother, an aunt, and a physician. *Journey through Life with Irene Riot* is an endearing attempt to capture the many emotions of a life well lived.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (September 14, 2012)

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