



Last of the Spirit Bears: The Greatest Hits (2014-2019): Paediatric Palliative Care & Complex Care Anthology

R. R. Pravin

AuthorHouse (May 23, 2019)

Softcover \$28.99 (644pp)

978-1-72831-081-7

Last of the Spirit Bears is a heartfelt anthology of poetry and prose that functions like a scrapbook of a doctor's experiences.

R. R. Pravin's anthology *Last of the Spirit Bears* assembles poems from four prior poetry collections, combined with prose and photographs, and reflects on medical work in the spirit of a personal scrapbook.

Pravin was first moved to write as a medical student in 2014. The resulting poem, "Caught in the Mo(u)rning Rain," began a multivolume effort to process, respond to, and capture the experience of working with families who require pediatric palliative and complex care. With the goal of providing consolation, encouragement, and connection for patients and families, the poetry and prose collected in this anthology reflects on and processes the unique emotions and experiences families go through during medical challenges.

Personal experiences are translated into narrative poems that adopt the voices of treated patients and their family members, recapitulating witnessed, overheard, or related incidents to imagine the interior experiences of children undergoing treatments or parents coping with treatments or losses. Such use of parents' and children's voices provokes questions about power dynamics, appropriation, and the curious paucity of personal experiences in self-narrated poems.

The poetry style is akin to pop music lyrics, using lineation, playful punctuation, and idioms reminiscent of a singer's musical phrases. The subject matter's heightened stakes translate into poems like "Cookie Jar," which asks:

*How many wishes
Will I live to see
Come true at last
How many dreams
Will I fulfil
Before I breathe my last*

Many of the poems' speakers are undergoing medical care at a young age, often in situations that are life or death, and this reality permeates the anthology. Across such a lengthy collection, his narrow focus leads to emotional fatigue and mutes the impact of the work.

The central speaker lavishes endearments and praise on the subjects of the poems, but the language and images are maudlin and hyperbolic. Every child is an angel, every girl a princess, and every parent a loving bulwark and hero. The anthology relies on these tropes.

The anthology contains a heavy ratio of prose interspersed between its poems. Lengthy photo captions include

personal and patient narratives, and each poem is followed by a prose explanation labeled #Inspiration. While the poems focus on personas, the prose is anecdotal and autobiographical. Because the prose passages are grounded in particulars about their subjects, they're often more engaging and memorable than the poems they connect to, revealing personal, evocative details about Pravin, his patients, and the unique experiences of pediatric palliative and complex care.

Last of the Spirit Bears is a heartfelt anthology that will be most salient and meaningful to those touched by the situations memorialized in its poems and prose.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July 9, 2019)

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