

Searching For Clarity

Gene Zimmerman

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The emotions and experiences of a bereaved spouse are at the center of the concise, elegant poetry collection Searching for Clarity.

Gene Zimmerman's poetry collection *Searching for Clarity* explores the nuances of grief in spare, accessible language.

Inspired by years of hardship and the death of the poet's wife, this collection encompasses the experiences of accompanying a loved one through a serious illness, as well as those of isolating grief. The poems seek to be a source of solace for others experiencing the same challenges; this is the collection's organizing principle.

Each poem is composed of four quatrains confined to a single page. The effect of this consistency is soothing. Through the repetition of how poems appear on the page, expectations are set and met. Ample white space in the book's margins and between stanzas adds to the comforting effect and provides room for contemplation.

Beyond this traditional formatting, though, the book evades adhering to familiar techniques, including of meters and rhyming, which are employed without discernible patterns. Musicality is intermittent; the book's free verse entries are its most resonant ones. There are standout metaphors, too, as in "The View," which forwards an invitation that transcends the poem's occasion, a walk in nature:

*As birds fly overhead
The bench is patient,
Though not always chosen,
It holds its stories.*

Most of the entries fall into the hybrid category of lyrical narrative poetry; many are devoted to exploring single moments. The collection's backstory is apparent throughout, but individual poems still focus on how their impetus moments impact the poet's emotions. A few entries are didactic, giving explicit advice or directions to others who are experiencing loss, as with "Special in You":

*Truly know what blessed is.
Create the time, spend the time,
Make the time.
Don't let the special in you slip your grasp.*

And there are standout images in a few entries, as in the opening lines of "Slept":

*The grass heads were at season's end,
The tips plump and long,
Swaying in the wind,
Gently moving through the day.*

In such moments, the book achieves its aim, becoming a balm for fellow travelers who have suffered their own pains because of the illnesses and deaths of loved ones. But whether or not individual entries do this work, each poem in the book wrestles with ancient questions ably, as of why people suffer, and how people can survive their losses.

Conveying the emotions and experiences of a bereaved spouse, the concise poems of *Searching for Clarity* achieve occasional elegance.

MICHELE SHARPE (January 20, 2022)

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