



WTF: Poems

Laura Foley

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These evocative poems are a detailed but disciplined examination of a daughter's understanding of her father.

Laura Foley's *WTF* is a collection of poems that reflect on and process the author's relationship with her father, who spent four years as a Japanese prisoner of war during World War II.

Foley alternates poems that explore her father's experience as a soldier in war with those illustrating the haunted and dark relationship he had with his daughter years later. These are all poems of memories—some the father's and some the daughter's—though all come in Foley's voice, retelling stories she heard either firsthand or through her father's acquaintances.

Poems reflect a father who might have been a more invested and attentive mentor, but their tone is sympathetic and demonstrates an inner strength in dealing with resentment. Even when poems very directly describe abuses and coldness, they treat Foley's father with kindness. They do not forgive, but they do attempt to understand.

Sparse and well conceived, the collection describes growing up with a father suffering from PTSD, capturing all of the related melancholy. Poems go beyond personal experience to connect the atrocities of war with the far-reaching, ongoing impact that some returning soldiers have on their families. They express a quiet and personal anti-war sentiment alongside easily identifiable disappointments with the author's upbringing.

Brief and clear vignettes go through many layers of trauma, loss, and hints of redemption. Appearing late in the book, "Message from Beyond" deals with Foley's father's accountability for Japanese skulls that were hidden or lost; it carries the only words that Foley addresses directly to her father.

*His artificial British accent
Used to irritate, but today
It sounds so painfully brittle –
We were on the verge of war,
You must understand –
I answer,
Daddy, I'm trying.*

This bittersweet homage is organized with its delicate back-and-forth; it is a beautifully encapsulated expression of their relationship.

Dedicated to Foley's father's memory, the book's title plays with his monogram on luggage and towels, irreverently sharing meaning with the abbreviation for "what the fuck." This tongue-in-cheek nod is curious, though it suggests a tone that is not consistent with the somber and moving content of the collection.

Foley's evocative poems are detailed but disciplined. Instead of explicitly describing moments and experiences, they

are judiciously fragmented, leaving room for interpretation. This book is a testament to the one identity that the author shares with her father, both of them being “survivors.”

SARA BUDZIK (May 1, 2017)

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