

September 2004

Volume 4, No. 3

POETRY

Watts, David. *Taking the History*, Skowhegan, ME: Central Maine Printing 1999. 50 pp. \$11.95

David Watts is an unusual physician – not only in being an extraordinarily caring human being, but in writing poetry about his work. I met him at the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder Colorado, where we spoke on the same panels. He tells wonderful stories of sharing these poems in healing ways with his patients.

Here are two of his poems from a slim book that would bless hands that picked it up from the shelf of any doctor's library or waiting room.

Physical Exam

I have told her I will not
do a pelvic, so already
we are on better terms.

I have learned when best
to say this,
so as to ease her fears.

But she worries that I
will examine her breasts,
perhaps
take too much pleasure
with beauty,
with softness... it's possible.

The truth is
unlike those I have loved
I do not remember the
breasts
I examine. I didn't think
it would be this way,
but it is.

And I feel the opening
of possibility, it's just that
it goes unrecorded,
as if to honor
the unspoken agreement.
Afterwards,
a transformation,
as if through this intimacy
we have become part
of each other
protective of each other—

Don't
misunderstand,
it's just that now
she stands close to me
and is not afraid.

The Body of My Brother

First it belonged to my mother
or seemed to
stuffed into her
like a foot in a sock.
Then it took care of itself,
filling out
into home runs, high jumps.
There were times
it must have been afraid
hiding in a bunker
in South Viet Nam
having happen to it whatever it was
that makes bodies years later
jump out of bed in the middle of the night
not awake
sweating and shouting.

Last time I saw it
it was older than mine,
thinned out by too many cigarettes
and favors given.
Now they've taken it
from the hospital bed
where it gasped out his last punch line
and put it in a box
that no one will ever see again
though we stand around it
observing gestures even death cannot
remove
head tilt, wry smile,
hands the same as my hands
crossed over his chest
as they never were in life
a few pictures and momentos
scattered around it
as if they were crumbs of a happy life.

HEART

By Barry Sultanoff, MD

Heart's the helper
who is always persevering.
She keeps on keeping on.
She's the love patrol,
reliably on beat
from dawn to dawn.

Heart is always
pumping energy.
Her natural home's

the center-hub
of all delighted actions:
She's the operatic sweetheart
who will give away
outrageous systoles
of fragrant rose--
and then, a second later,
blushing, sally forth
her diastolic gifts
of bud bouquets.

Heart's a loyal lover,
bathing all of her beloveds

in the bright red Ganges
of her strong arterial devotion.
Heart's blue-bloodline
is matriarchal,
pulsing, princess-pure,
her stem cells tracing back

to Divine Mother,
to Sarada Devi,
to the Pele-heart
of Vulcan's machoistic roar.

Her blood type is
(It's always been!)
BE-Positive

But here's the hidden matter
of the heart:
Heart really hurts.
She aches.
The wounded heart knows
all the pain there ever is
and all that's ever been.

Heart has infinite compassion
for all mortals,
for she tastes their joy
and knows their sorrows--
from the salty seaside
of their oft-times saddened seeing
through the worn and hidden valleys
and the raw and knarly hot-spots
in the cellars of their being.

She knows mortality.
Heart has been there
through it all -
with the steady thrumming of
her Dum, Ta-Dum, Ta-Dum, Ta-Dum.

Choose heart
as your true friend:
She'll never fail or falter.
You can always
count on her.

You can slide
your jangled nerves
onto the hammock
of her legendary steadiness;
and float there, unimpeded,
like a prayer flag
gently blowing in

the limpid breeze
above her temple floor.

At times
the heart may bring
an odd arrhythmia or two:
Like you,
she can trip up
and lose her way.
But soon enough,
so naturally,
she will reclaim
her loving metronome,
reverting as before
to her bright cadence
and true phase.

Trust me, if you will:
This well-tempered heart
is squeaky smart.
She'll not lie still for long.
For mute passivity just
leaves her heart-broken and pale.
She must express herself –
or run the risk of choking
on her own suppressed
intelligence.

Cradle heart
in both your hands,
you'll know the hidden pulse
of all the water
in the universe.
This heart, she reaches
every secret well,
fanning out her tiny tendrils,
tapping sustenance.
Even in the driest stone,
she finds a rivulet.

Inside heart is heat,
the kind that warms old socks
and dessicates their mustiness,
old mold spinning gold.

Also inside heart is hat,
the soft and floppy kind
that you can pull
over your sagging spirits.
If you've taken grief to bed,
she'll proffer you a cover
for your cold and aching head.
The hurt of heart
is yours to have,
as is her rare enlightenment,
her cartwheel-turning ecstasy
Her giving's never countermanded –
not in any aspect of her chart.

Heart is the intrepid giver:
Her domain is your heart-felt desire.

Can you accept,
can you receive,
can you entrain to this, her subtle art?
For after all,
this lover, heart,

is full-aligned
with your most sacred part.

Haiku, Hawaii
June, 2004

TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically. You may choose to print your downloaded copy for relaxed reading. Feel free to forward this to others.

The International Journal of Healing and Caring
P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099
Phone (609) 714-1885 - Fax (609) 714-3553

Email: center@ijhc.org Web Site: <http://www.ijhc.org>

Copyright 2001 IJHC. All rights reserved.