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From now through Feb. 27 *Just Out* is offering a **FREE** pair of tickets to the March 4 Portland concert with comic **Kathy Griffin**.

HOW CAN YOU WIN?

Everyone who stops by *Just Out* with a donation of canned food for Esther's Pantry will be entered into a drawing to win these tickets. Food will be accepted weekdays at *Just Out* at 6234 N. Greeley.

The winning entry will be drawn on Monday, March 2.

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books

Intensive Care

Retired doctor uses poetry to heal
from battle with cancer

by Kristin Steele

The word "survival" can be limited in its scope, sometimes only implying the act of continuing to live. To take that act of living, put it under the microscope and create art out of the pain, grief, love and gratitude found therein is something else altogether.

Melissa Beal is turning her life of repeated survival into something more.

Beal is an accomplished 54-year-old Salem doctor at Pacific Pathology Associates who is retiring after 18 years of service. There she has served as department chairwoman and chief for 13 years and as president of the professional corporation for six years. She also spent six years as medical director of the laboratory.

But none of these titles would indicate what she was to become on the brink of retirement from what had been her life's work: poet. Beal recently released her first book of poetry, *In Her Eyes*.

The list of circumstances Beal has come through can make the mind spin. She was raped for years by her grandfather as a child. She had a near-death experience and broke both legs while mountain climbing at age 20. She confronted her own alcohol dependency in 2004. And then, as if all that weren't enough, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2006.

Any one of these things might have been cause to throw in the towel. But instead Beal used them as fuel for expression and opportunity for introspection. Her father's death in 1997 opened the door to her creative self, but it was her battle with cancer that created the right atmosphere for the book to

come. Billed as "healing poetry for living in the moment," *In Her Eyes* explores the very human desire to tell the stories of experience. There is pain in the work, but there is also beauty and love.

Writing poetry was an act of defiance against what might have appeared as a stacked deck. Many of the poems were written as Beal battled ovarian cancer.

"Chemotherapy gave me the space in my life to actually sit down and look at things a little more slowly than I had been and to really feel the things that had affected me and my life," she told iUniverse Radio. "From that came this ability or willingness to create poetry, and in that creation it really had a healing effect on me."

The large collection of 180 poems in the book came quickly. Beal started the book in March 2006 and saw the

final published work in July 2008.

As Beal told iUniverse Radio, many of the poems just came to her and seemingly "wrote themselves" without much effort or turmoil. And it is often these pieces that find the most resonance with her audience when she shares them.

"Bleeding Heart" is one of those pieces:

*The world is coming up blooms.
Bleeding heart.
Hyacinth.
Forsythia.
Names, like old-fashioned tunes,
Not heard much any more.
The ancients are awakening.*



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