

TERRY POE PHOTOGRAPHY



"My happiness now comes from the pursuit of art, not science," Melissa Beal says.

Healing circle.

Fire pit.

Prayer.

Activities, like long-forgotten dances,

Awaiting our participation.

Raising our voices

In unison, we shape the future

With our words.

Many of the book's poems draw their force and detail from the natural world and more pedestrian objects of life, putting Beal's work as a poet in stark contrast to her work as a doctor.

"Pathology, of all the subspecialties in medicine, deals primarily in science and scientific pursuits. We do autopsies, evaluate tissues and cells with a microscope, and direct the hospital laboratories. This type of work has been satisfying and rewarding for many years, but my happiness now comes from the pursuit of art, not science," said Beal.

That is not to say that the experience of being a doctor and of her life's work studying the nature of disease doesn't creep into her newfound artistic pursuit.

"My work as a pathologist has, in part, influenced my writing," said Beal. "I wrote some poems about death and birth. I wrote some poems about corpses and autopsies. These more morbid subjects are balanced with works about love and compassion and life."

Instead of following the more traditional publishing route and running the risk of having to modify her work for a publisher at the cost

of her artistic vision, Beal chose to keep all of the decisions in her own hands by self-publishing.

"I self-published and marketed *In Her Eyes* for a very specific reason. I wanted to maintain control of the work. I wanted to express myself without editing," said Beal. "I was concerned that an editor or publisher would pick through the book and discard poems and ideas that were deemed to be of no financial value and no popular value. I hope I have maintained the integrity of the book with this attempt."

In addition to the healing Beal has found in her work, she also hopes to use her work to heal others in both tangible and intangible ways. She has given proceeds from book signing events to Portland Women's Crisis Line and Salem Hospital's Cancer Institute. She has also used local promotional readings to partner with other artists such as singer/songwriter/poet Paula Sinclair and Salem poet John Edge.

"The convergence of art with philanthropy is an aim of mine," said Beal. "The love and connection which is generated by giving spreads like rings on a pond."

Beal also believes she can be of more service as a writer in the world by sharing her story, knowing that sometimes the specifics of the experience aren't as important as the model of learning from it.

"Many people have had difficult and painful journeys. My experiences are not unique, but are shared by the collective," said Beal. "I want to lead a path through the forest of troubles and make the journey easier for others."

Cancer-free for more than two years, Beal lives in Salem with her partner and three stepchildren, also spending time in Newport. In her post-retirement life, in addition to writing, she and her partner show Appaloosa horses. 10

More poetry from MELISSA BEAL can be found online at www.melissabeal.com. *In Her Eyes* is available at *In Other Words* and *Powell's* in Portland as well as *Tea Party Bookshop* in Salem. It can also be found online at www.iuniverse.com, www.bn.com and www.amazon.com.

KRISTIN STEELE is a Portland writer and educator. Her work has appeared online, onstage and in newspapers, magazines and anthologies.

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