

Red Thread Through a Rusty Needle

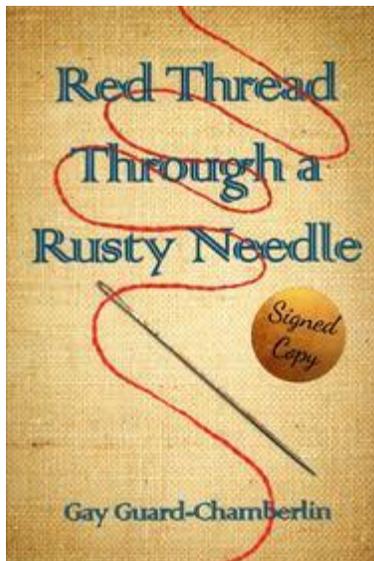
By Gay Guard-Chamberlin

New Wind Publishing, 2019

74 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1929777129

Review by Lennart Lundh



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The thirty-six poems of Gay Guard-Chamberlin's collection, *Red Thread Through a Rusty Needle*, are wide-ranging, touching on a buffet of subjects, including horses, dogs, and crows; parents and other relations; neighbors and emotions-as-humans; Easter eggs and politics (both electoral and inter-personal). They are highly personal and revelatory, but also imbued with a strong sense of universality.

Better still, they are also well-written, reflecting the author's mastery of the poet's craft. Form generally follows function, amplifying carefully chosen words instead of burying them. There's nothing obscure in the imagery, and the text is free of the typos that seem to plague current small press productions.

The lengthy prose poem "Stella Maris" acquaints us with the wonderful character of Guard-Chamberlin's grandmother, who "dated Johnny Weissmuller before he went to Hollywood and became Tarzan." We're told of a book Stella Maris' father gifted her in a dream: "She swallowed the book and the little black seeds of letters sprouted inside her. When she opened her mouth, invisible words tumbled out. My grandmother fed me with sweet invisible words she grew inside her." Such a way to be remembered and immortalized.

"Corporal" presents its subject in much less detail, but this simply allows the reader to complete the sketch by drawing on every veteran they've either known or seen in a film. The closing is beautifully vague:

Home the hero
tosses the papers
into a rusty tin tub
splashes in a dash
of high-flash kerosene
and a goddamned handy

strike-anywhere match.

Using thirty-seven precise words, "The Inner Life of Words" exposes *heart*, leaving us "listening // from the heart / of the heart."

The narrator of "After Hearing of Your Suicide" examines both the resulting grief and their sense of culpability:

Did I notice? Did I listen?
or did I lean my head
at the right angle to convey attention,
then place a bookmark between your words
so my mind could wander off in the woods instead?

For readers who have lived in rural or smaller urban towns, “Shift Change” (p. 21) holds a most relatable, and carefully alliterative, verse: “Street lamps would flit on and off, fitful, / forgetful, an erratic glimmer along darkened / streets neon-lit by a few small shops.”

Out of fairness to the reader, enough; there’s not a single piece here unworthy of being pointed out. In the end, despite deeply plumbed wells, these are surprisingly gentle poems. There are no eruptions of anger at others or the narrator’s memories. Instead, there is honesty in these poems that is careful and caring. Out of fairness to yourself and the poet, add a copy to your library.

===== About the reviewer:Lennart Lundh is a poet, short-fictionist, historian, and photographer. His work has appeared internationally since 1965.

Posted June 1, 2020

Hand on my Heart

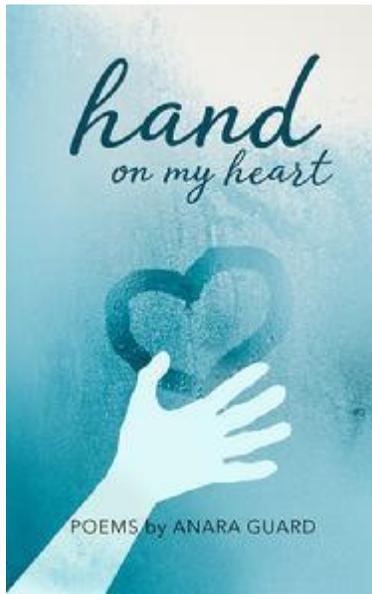
By Anara Guard

New Wind Publishing, 2019

66 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1929777136

Review by Lennart
Lundh



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In its thirty-six free-verse poems, Anara Guard's collection, *Hand on my Heart*, unflinchingly approaches the narrator's personal and public lives, complete with joys and tragedies both mundane and spiritual. Serious and direct, Guard consistently fills her ruminations with wonderful images. The language is clear and carefully chosen, the subjects and references cross-generational.

"Yes, She Knew" speaks to Yeats' "Leda and the Swan," answering what the poet sees as its central question quickly and directly, following with vivid imagery as proof:

They flew above the forests
heaving with rain,
and she watched the flamingos dance
their pink seduction.
She saw the deserts,
scraped clean to the bone.

In contrast, ">45" answers its question, "*What is greater than forty-five?*" by way of a clever, and clearly political, list poem that always and never names its subject:

Bottles of beer on the wall
Cards in a deck, even after we remove all the jokers

Colors in the big box of crayons
Native American nations

before concluding, "what is greater than 45? // *We are.*"

After "Hole in My Head" reminds us of the fragility of memories ("Where is that word? / I need it to fill a hole / in my heart."), "Regret" warns, through their similarity to a garden, against failing to deal with them in time:

I have waited too long to prune
and my roses have grown tangled
and straggly. They resist
all efforts to tame them now.

Miscarriages and drownings. Recycling. Love, with its resilience or departure. The inevitable growth of a child and the lessons contained therein. *Hand on My Heart* is a marvelous gathering of Life's examples to us, deserving from start to finish of your time.

===About the reviewer:Lennart Lundh is a poet, short-fictionist, historian, and photographer. His work has appeared internationally since 1965. Posted June 1, 2020

In the Dark, Soft Earth

*Poetry of Love, Nature,
Spirituality and Dreams*

By Frank Watson

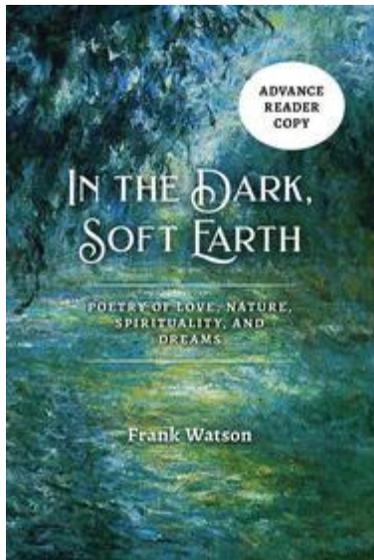
Plum White Press, 2020

231 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1-939832-20-7

ISBN-10: 1-939832-20-9

Review by Mary Beth Bretzlauf



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I was given an Advanced Reader Copy of this book due to be released later this year. Having one of the first looks at this collection is like opening up a journal found hidden away in a cave forgotten by man for centuries. When you open this book, you are greeted with a welcome - a contemporary haiku - a road sign as we travel through these pages.

*finding meaning
in the subtle underpinnings
of this soft earth*

I picture Frank Watson writing from a mystical castle, rooted in the dark, soft earth and yet soaring into the sky. Wistful, he watches the journey of his silhouetted love sailing above the water. That is the imagery that wrapped around me as I read the book. If you want to be taken away to an ancient world, learn of old, lost love, then this is the poetry book for you.

Artwork accompanies much of the poet's work in this publication. The visual art compliments the poems that speak of another place, another time. While much of the artwork is in the public domain, other were used by permission.

The book is broken up into ten books.

Within the Weeping Woods
Between Time and Space
Assembly Required
Percussion Mind
A Dance Between the Light
Beneath the Raven Moon
Omens

An Entrance to the Tarot Garden
Across the Continents
Stories Before I Sleep

So much of nature and time are a part of this collection. You can almost feel the earth, sand or moss between your toes as he leads us into the glimpses of his world that he allows us to see. I expect to smell the earth, be enshrouded in a cool mist from the sea. In the poem *Fossils*, Watson writes:

*in two thousand years
they will find an oak fossil
with the lovers' names*

and in the poem *Rhythms*, the last stanza gives us another glimpse:

*in this country
made of trees*

*the music sleeps
between the leaves*

I found Book 8, entitled 'An Entrance to a Tarot Garden' to be the most interesting - bringing to life the soul of the characters from the 'High Priest' to 'Death', to 'The Countess'. Having the artwork next to the poems adds that extra dimension for contemplation.

This is definitely a book to read at your leisure. A few of his poems make sharp changes that distract the reader. Many of Watson's poems will lift you in a fanciful journey with that long-ago lover for which he still pines.

Still

By Mary Jo Balistreri

FutureCycle Press, 2018

94 Pages

ISBN 978-1942371588

*blazing firewood...
be drink cider
with a bite*

So begins my journey into the still life this book represents. Yet, her poems paint anything but stillness.

Review by Mary Beth Bretzlauf

I read *Still* by Mary Jo Balistreri twice before I felt I could share my experience with you. I felt that I had met an instant friend and I wasn't ready to share her with you just yet.

I'm just going to put it out there - Mary Jo is a marvel to the world. With her musical and artist souls braided together, she crafted a collection that had me soaring and diving into the pictures she painted for the reader with her lyrical words.

Even now, I am longing for the beaches at sunrise, to imagine myself painting with Van Gogh as my inspiration. I feel a need to enter her world again.

She took me on a journey - of young married life with all its gushy love, of sadness scattering like weeds coming through the cracked pavement. Of silent hours where our minds are anything but silent, but chasing the unattainable, dreaming of another life and shouting at the world.

Her artist's eye pulled me along as she wondered of Van Gogh and how colors were his words in "Dear Vincent". She weaves concertos with colors in "Improv Blue"

"Without A Voice" is a rallying cry to women to not remain silent, still - that we must speak. It is a timely message to all generations of women. She ends it with this line:

*at what point in speaking the language of silence
do we become a quarry of stone?*



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In "How to Deal with the Dead" I am comforted with the knowledge they are still among us - so helpful to me since I lost my father a few months ago.

I would write about more of her poems inside the covers of *Still* - but I want you to feel them for yourself. You won't look at colors the same again, especially, orange.

Still

By Mary Jo Balistreri

FutureCycle Press, 2018

94 Pages

ISBN 978-1942371588

Review by Charlotte
Digregorio



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Award-winning Poet and Author Mary Jo Balistreri has written a book that you'll keep coming back to on your bookshelf. *Still* is an adventure to read with many experiences we can all relate to. The poems are like stories. At times, she speaks of sorrowful experiences-from cancer to family illness/deaths, but she always comes back to hope for the opportunity of beginnings, appreciation, and gratitude for the beauty of life that surrounds us.

Here is one poem:

Waiting for The Light Rail by Mary Jo Balistreri

She sits in an alcove of light and dark,
a pause between coming and going.
She's an empty bench, a blank sheet of paper,
a sign askew, a mouthful of air,
a pencil in hand, and the *now of now*.
In the spaciousness of release, her mind fills
with words, the words become flesh,
and a cement shelter melds with the loam
of a thousand fields, fragrant as the fleshy blooms
that dangled from her father's pear trees. Now on the cusp
of summer, the wind ruffles her hair, rustles leaves
she cannot see, carries the whistle of the oncoming train—
and is the breath that writes the living poem,
intertwined, inexhaustible.

Balistreri has a talent for poetic imagery with consummate sensory appeal. Her elegant language is music with her background as a professional musician. Here are some of my favorite lines from a variety of poems:

- In the waning light, beech trees along the river/ morph into pillars of a faraway temple.
- frosted window panes/ spangles of dreamscapes/ like antique lace
- wings flicking just slightly upward before/graceful, gangly legs drop down into courtships of bows and leaps,/jumps and pirouettes.
- The last sunflower in the barrel/ closed its petals this morning/ragged cloak faded

- the diamond-dazzle or sheen of light/ swallowing sailboats in its maw.
- Let your eyes rest where the red of winter wheat/ flames in a prairie you thought bare
- I inhale marsh and musk./The plonk of a carp emphasizes the silence
- the silver-gray splay of light after storms,
- my father, who doesn't recognize my face./Sometimes he hums snatches of songs,/but he has lost the key,/his shadowed smile uncertain.

This is a book that poets and non-poets will appreciate. It will encourage everyone to notice the beauty around them, and to capture and write about it. Highly recommended for yourself or to gift to others.

Everblue Soul **By Gregg Dotoli**

Subterranean Blue Poetry
Imprint, 2019
64 Pages
ISBN 9781099564178

Review by Mary Beth Bretzlauf

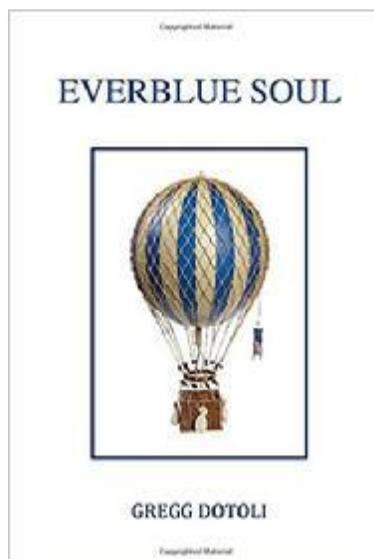
It is clear from the start that poet Gregg Dotoli knows his heart. So many of the poems are love poems. His euphoric love for an individual, and the crushing of the heart at the end of a relationship is clear but so is his love for this earth. That is the key to his poetic soul, I think.

There are several poems that refer to his youth, the coming of age in the 1960's and how the Vietnam War changed so much of what he and his generation thought. In *Come on Dream*, I feel the urgency to find the REM state to seek the solace that you only find in dreams.

There are so many poems that resonated with me - the anguish in *Last Dance (Climate Tears)*. The pain of losing Nature in such a reckless manner is so devastating to him that you are bereft as well after reading some of these poems. Other poems, *A Sense of Scent*, *Grace Gifts*, and *Seeds* also grabbed me.

I found a couple of poems lost behind a black page and a few pieces of artwork that seemed too dark. I was left wondering what the original piece really looked like.

All in all, this was a poetic journey that kept me turning the page.



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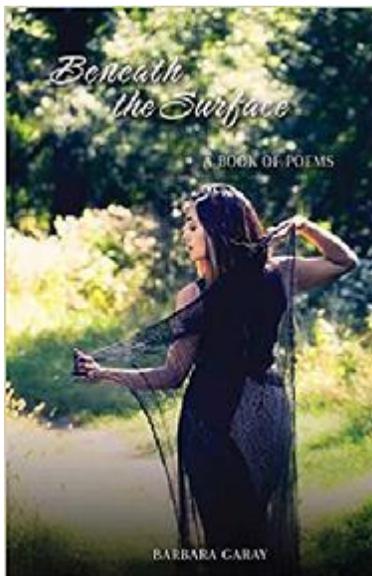
Beneath The Surface: A Book of Poems
By Barbara Garay

Self-published; available on Amazon.com

143 pages

ISBN: 978-0578458663

Review by Mike Freveletti



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Beneath the Surface, by Barbara Garay, is a collection of poems with strong personal narrative focused on trauma, love, and respect for the adventure of life. Garay mentions the influence of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, De Beauvoir, and Levinas. I found I didn't need to be well versed in philosophy to enjoy what this collection had to offer.

The collection is broken into five thematic sections: Roots, Love, Heartbreak, Inner Struggles, and Resilience. The poet has, with the help of a photographer, interspersed black and white photos, which lend to the earnestness of the collection and further accentuates the mood of the poems. I have never been a huge fan of rhyming poetry, but I do understand its place in the genre, and I can appreciate it when it's done well. Reading lines like "*beneath the stars/measuring/the depth of our scars/ruminating/on our immanence/while losing our innocence*," you see a poet who understands pacing and how rhyming can be deployed in a way that's pleasant to read, even out loud.

I couldn't help but feel like I was reading a memoir in verse. A memoir is only as interesting as the subject who's decided to let us in. When you're treated to emotional, heartfelt writing about someone else's experiences that could've only been shared through the poetic medium, I think that's an extraordinary honor. I was offered a window into the mind of the poet talking about abuse and its ability to stick in the psyche like a parasite in the poem "Abuse": "*she hides/inside her mind/and prays for a hand that's kind/but continual silence/ . . .*" You feel the difficulty of being heard, and when the poem ends with, "*with ashen waste/that is still felt/inside her mouth/this-very-day*," you get to see poetry as the perfect vehicle for the things we need to say but are sometimes unsure how.

As I read the collection, the one word that continued to flash in my mind was *cohesion*. Poetry collections that claim some connective tissue between poems sometimes fail in telling a story, but with this book, I felt I had gotten my beginning, middle, and end. Cohesion is not always something I require in my reading, but the author was successful with this group of poems.

Garay's introduction describes poems as snapshots frozen in time, and she's right. *Beneath the Surface* gives us a moment in time full of instances, feelings, and reckonings, all of which help us understand how each is a factor in the understanding of who we really are. She tells us a story in short bursts, which makes connections with our lives, while trying to better remember all the details therein. "*We endure, we*

learn, we rise, and we evolve,” Garay says, and I’d say her poetry is evidence that she’s done just that.