

The healing power of words after a tragedy

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Wellness Community-Delaware's The Poetry of Wellness workshop leader, Newark poet Maggie Rowe.

IF YOU GO

Poetry of Wellness summer class

When: 10:30 a.m. June 30, July 28 and Aug. 25

Where: Wellness Community (Sussex County branch), 18947 John J. Williams Highway, Rehoboth Beach

Information: 645-9150

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Poetry speaks to our greater needs.

I am not surprised that thousands of people, their lives rearranged by Sept. 11, wrote poems to share their grief over the tragic events. In the days and months after the attacks, poetry became visible across the ash-covered walls of lower Manhattan, and in small town newspapers across the nation.

More quiet, less public tragedies than Sept. 11 have equally great power to rearrange life.

Illness, for example, causes us to reconsider our greater needs. A potentially fatal illness like cancer can force a sudden and jarring overhaul of anyone's Top Ten list.

Aware that Delaware has one of the highest cancer mortality rates in the nation, a local grass roots movement of Delawareans whose lives had been changed by cancer founded The Wellness Community-Delaware. This nonprofit organization explores new ways of dealing with the physical and emotional problems related to a cancer diagnosis. The community offers patients, people in recovery, and family members a wide range of free programs.

One way of dealing with change is to write. Every Tuesday at 12:30 The Wellness Community-Delaware hosts "The Poetry of Wellness," led by Newark poet Maggie Rowe. The suggestion to

host a poetry group, says Sean Hebbel, TWC program director, "came from one of our participants who had used poetry for her own emotional healing."

At Hebbel's request, I initiated the poetry group at The Wellness Community in 2004.

Welcoming those who have never written alongside experienced writers, together the weekly group has explored encounters with cancer and with life for the past five and a half years.

The class began last Tuesday, as usual, with a minor feast -- mixed nuts, cheese and crackers, sourdough twists, chocolate with cranberries, and chicken Alfredo -- "I wish I could remember everything we ate!" laughs Rowe.

The poets discussed a poem by west coast poet James Ragan, and then worked individually on the day's free write.

"We wrote from the prompts, 'loitering feet' and 'blue cloud'," says participant Eleanore Morrow.

It's the sharing and the totally joyful environment that keeps me coming back," says Morrow, who has attended "The Poetry of Wellness" for three years. "The strong possibility of cancer's return is always with me, but there is life to be lived -- thank heavens for poetry!"

Under Rowe's editorship, the group has published "Poems of Shadows and Light." Available through Amazon, the collection is the culmination of several years of workshops and includes poems and artwork from 13 participants.

It's a book that "had to be written," remarks former Delaware poet laureate Fleda Brown, "to give voice to the moments that arise out of extremity."

A reading and book signing will be held at 1 p.m. today at The Gibby Center, 45 W. Main St., Middletown.

TWO POEMS FROM *POEMS OF SHADOWS AND LIGHT*

Recall

Nine months
have begun to bleach
the bones of my grief
and I am starting to worry:
will another nine months
scour them clean completely?
Purify them and leave them to crumble?
It is already difficult to recall your voice
even though your smile is so clear
in my mind's eye
and I would recognize your hands
among thousands.

-- Anneliese R. Strube

Painting the House

She's painting the house,
something I always avoid.
When her kaleidoscope of chips
is splayed before me,
I say, "that's a nice shade of blue,"
and she says, "that's beige, why do I bother?"
I once told her I was colorblind.
It has saved us many arguments.

She's selling the house,
something I'd usually do.
The children have children.
The vacant rooms run front to back.
It has four floors,
and I know it annoys her
to see me pause to catch my breath
on each landing.

She's buying a new house
(something I'd never let her do)
with a view of a pond full of lilies,
where a migratory bird might dally,
and a cat sit on the slate stone
staring all day at the flashes;
with a porch large enough for both of us,
but not so large that she will feel the wind.

--C. B. Reeves

Additional Facts

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