

es,

IF YOU PRAISE A WORD, IT TURNS INTO A POEM

Praise to this poem
for letting me write it.
To book titles
that give away clues.

Praise to the time on a watch
so I am not late.
To the shell
that washes upon the shore for me.

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Praise to the fly's eye
with which he sees everything.
To the grass
that whistles when I blow it.

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Praise to the mud
that makes me dirty when I play.
To the thunder
that warns me of a lightning flash.

Praise to my name
without which I'd be no one.
To this poem
for letting me write it.

Caitlin Weber, 4th grade
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THERE ARE WORDS IN US

There are words in us
That don't know how
To get to the surface.

Words hidden in our marrow
Afraid to show themselves
Afraid the world will come apart
If they are spoken.

Words that cannot stop trembling
So deep the river of pain
That must be crossed
To say to the person
Next to us,
"Are you in as much pain as I am?"
"Are you hiding too?"

Words that wish to tell the world
How much we are
How much love is hidden
Just below our fear.

Words that know how to sing
How much we care
How much we dare love.

And some of these words have
Somehow found their way
And live among us
Barely hidden in plain sight
In everyone's eyes,
If only we had
trust in these words
To speak themselves
For the freedom of us all.

Word hide in the strangest places,
Under stones, in clouds,
In a moment of your friend's kindness
In a moment of your generosity
Poems are beginning
Their first line
Climbing happily
Into the heart singing
How close the moon comes
When we trust the night.

Words even hide
In other words.
Mercy hides in the hesitant pause,
Attempting to delay what is felt,
Questioning how much is safe
To say out loud,
How much can be trusted
To the tongue, to the pen.
Reminding what has not forgotten
That in our heart
It is our own true song
Rising toward the surface.
Telling us
Hope has put a pen
In our hands
For us to find our song.

Stephen Levine

Stephen Levine, author of *A Gradual Awakening* and *Who Dies?* is a long time friend and advocate of this work. He wrote this poem especially for the Institute for Poetic Medicine. It describes so well what occurs with "poetic medicine" and this poem is helpful to those who hear it.

THE REMEDIES

Half on the Earth, half in the heart,
the remedies for all the things
which grieve us wait for those who know
the words to use to find them.

Penobscott people use to make
a medicine for cancer from Mayapple
and South American people knew
the quinine cure for malaria
a thousand years ago.

But it is not just in the roots,
the stems, the leaves,
the thousand flowers
that healing lies.
Half of it lives within the words
the healer speaks.

And when the final time has come
for one to leave this Earth
there are no cures,
for Death is only
part of Life, not a disease.

Half on the Earth, half in the heart,
the remedies for all our pains
wait for the songs of healing.

Joseph Bruchac

from **THE POETRY OF HEALING**

I wonder, then, whether poetry might also be therapeutic. Many of my friends, especially my colleagues in medicine, have teased me for believing in the curative power of words, joking that I should write some doggerel on my prescriptions instead of names of medications and directions for their use. If poetry is made of breath, or the beating heart, then surely it is not unreasonable to think it might reach those places in the bodies of its audience, however rarefied. Moreover, I joke back, I have never seen a poem cause fulminant liver failure or bone marrow toxicity, even a really bad one.

Putting the month to words, and by incantation returning regular rhythms to the working lungs, there were the principles by which ancient healers in Native American cultures practiced their art. The Egyptians gave their dead a book full of charms and spells to be used in their afterlife--might not poetry then, facilitate the passing to another realm? Poetry is the pulsing, organized imagining of what once was, or is to be. What life once was, what life is to be. It is ampules of the purest, clearest drug of all, the essence and distillation of the process of living itself.

Rafael Campo, M.D.

Harvard Medical School & Beth Israel Hospital

WHEN SOMEONE DEEPLY LISTENS TO YOU

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you,
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you,
your barefeet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

John Fox

Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life. When we listen to people there is an alternating current, and this recharges us so that we never get tired of each other...and it is this little creative fountain inside us that begins to spring and cast up new thoughts and unexpected laughter and wisdom. Well, it is when people really listen to us, with quiet fascinated attention, that the little fountain begins to work again, to accelerate in the most surprising way."

Brenda Ueland

The Little Duck

Now we are ready to look at something pretty special.

It is a duck riding the ocean a hundred feet beyond the surf,
And he cuddles in the swells.

There is a big heaving in the Atlantic.

And he is part of it.

He can rest while the Atlantic heaves, because he rests in the
Atlantic.

Probably he doesn't know how large the ocean is.

And neither do you.

But he realizes it.

And what does he do, I ask you.

He sits down in it.

He reposes in the immediate as if it were infinity – which it is.

That is religion, and the duck has it.

I like the little duck.

He doesn't' know much.

But he has religion.

Donald Babcock, from *The Lyfe Poems of Donald Babcock*
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MIRACLE FAIR

The commonplace miracle:
that so many common miracles take place.

The usual miracles:
invisible dogs barking
in the dead of night.

One of many miracles:
a small and airy cloud
is able to upstage the massive moon.

Several miracles in one:
an alder is reflected in the water
and is reversed from left to right
and grows from crown to root
and never hits bottom
though the water isn't deep.

A run-of-the-mill miracle:
winds mild to moderate
turning gusty in storms.

A miracle in the first place:
cows will be cows.

Next but not least:
just this cherry orchard
from just this cherry pit.

A miracle minus top hat and tails:
fluttering white doves.

A miracle (what else can you call it):
the sun rose today at three fourteen a.m.
and will set tonight at one past eight.

A miracle that's lost on us:
the hand actually has fewer than six fingers
but still it's got more than four.

A miracle, just take a look around:
the inescapable earth.

An extra miracle, extra and ordinary:
the unthinkable
can be thought.

~ Wislawa Szymborska ~

From *View With a Grain of Sand*, translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh
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It is only by breaking open entirely,
by allowing our heart and whole being
to break open again and again,
wider than we ever thought possible,
that the unbreakable jewel is revealed:
the belovedness of being itself,
the radiant diamond that we have always been.
By loving, truly loving every aspect
of who we are,
an inexplicable laughter is born
from the deepest sorrow,
an exquisite song emerges
from the most terrifying scream,
the most tender child is awakened
through the hateful murderer,
our purest holiness is revealed
by our willingness to embrace
the very thing that most frightens us
and we find unexpectedly the treasure
where we least expect it to be.
Often in the most disavowed part
of who we are.

Rashani, "Again and Again"

