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# what we owe each other

Risa Denenberg



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In her first published collection of poetry, Risa Denenberg delves deep into the concept of debt in "what we owe each other." Through these poems, we will learn about Denenberg's, a nurse practitioner, relationship with Jon, a man whom she first befriended and then ultimately cared for during his struggles with complications from HIV/AIDS. The poems document Jon's horrific responses to his medical treatment more than a decade after the CDC coined the names, human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. They take place during the months surrounding Jon's death in the summer of 1993 and recall the years that follow when Denenberg contemplates how her memories of that time still impact her life. They are presented in an unchronicled fashion just as the tumultuous memories that surround the death of a friend or loved one tend to return, with the clarity of brief, pivotal moments that are often filled with regret and that pose more questions than answers. Denenberg combines the clinical acuity of a practitioner's eye with the sensitivity of a poet's heart to convey the emotional rift that can occur in someone who must draw upon their professional caregiver skills while simultaneously experiencing the emotional turmoil of being present while a loved one is dying. Many of the poems simultaneously address her feelings of loss with the multifaceted reality of our existence and the implications that a death can have for those who remain. Others offer us her observations of the many different cultural and religious practices that take place at that time and their moral implications. It is through the processing of memories that we learn their meaning, and it is through a recognition of the implications of our deeds and thoughts that we only begin to gain an understanding of the effects we can have on others and the lasting effects that others ultimately can have on us. O.P.W. Fredericks, Editor

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