

**In Her Eyes**  
**Melissa L. Beal MD**

*Reviewed by Kristine Morris*

Poet Melissa L. Beal, a pathologist by profession, writes with the hand and heart of a survivor: childhood experiences of sexual abuse, a narrow escape from death at the age of nineteen, surviving ovarian cancer, and recovering from addiction have marked her as a wounded warrior—no one leaves such battles unscathed. But remaining open to beauty and love in spite of such suffering is a choice one makes, and Beal has chosen openness and self-expression rather than bitterness. In doing so, she has claimed life's gift to the poet, an awakened sensitivity to the human condition and to life's cycles of birth and death. Poems like "The Wave," in which the strength of the heart triumphs over a wave's pull toward death, and "Warrior," which speaks of love's ability to give life a new beginning free of the burdens of the past, highlight a survivor's strength in this volume of collected poetry; other poems reflect on the beauty and power of nature, or express grief, pain, and despair over loss, illness, and abuse.

Beal admits that she would be lost without poetry and its ability to touch and heal the soul ("Lost Without Poetry"); poetry, when shared, can also move beyond personal healing to touch others who have suffered. In "Ferruginous Blood" the reader inhabits the body of a child subject to sexual abuse by a grandfather, and the child's feeling of "Life ripped open, / and from me. / Guttled like a rainbow trout / caught frigid from the / water of the river."

The choice to work in rhyme forces a poet to deal with the difficult task of avoiding "expected" words and greeting-card clichés; Beal, in her rhyming poems, has confronted the task with a degree of success, often avoiding the most obvious words to reach farther into the language for a more creative choice. (*more*)

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