

Healing Visions

Meg Boscov

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A balm for the weary and a comfort to the physically or mentally ill, Healing Visions is a masterful collection of photographs and prose.

Meg Boscov's *Healing Visions* couples fine art photographs of the natural world with 100-word microessays written by an international array of women writers of poetry and prose.

Early in the project, Boscov reveals that she has fibromyalgia, a nerve disorder that does not show up on MRIs, CT scans, X-rays, or other diagnostic tests, but that leads to intense, crippling pain. Doctors have denied that what she describes is real, and she's been shushed, condescended to, told the condition is in her head, and dubbed an attention seeker. The book details her frustrations and implies that the medical and psychiatric professions can do better by people.

To fill the gap between need and care, this book—preparations for which began during a COVID-19 shutdown—asks what might be done to address pain and save society from further calamities. It gathers together women writers, some well known and others not, who respond to questions about healing in their own particular ways. They consider the meanings of health and sickness in conjunction with nature photographs that serve as further prompts.

Of the resultant fifty-two microessays, some are personal, some are political, and all are unified most by their connections to the broad, overarching theme of healing. However, some of the entries are opaque, as with "At the Corner of Resentment and Curiosity" and "Healing Vision;" "Desert Muse" reports on pain in amorphous terms. Others, as with Xu Xi's "Root, Root, Root," generate intrigue (in that case, with a sketched glimpse of the American Dream in which a personal affinity for baseball can be a distraction from pain, alleviating alluded-to political and social discomforts). "Eventide" is a joyful reminiscence of a time when illness and physical depletion seemed to be improbable future points; in the present, it giggles over aging. And "Prayer for Saint Fiacre" is elegiac and mournful, reflecting on missed opportunities, lost connections, and time wasted in satisfying form.

Quite often, complementing the images that run throughout, nature itself is treated as an avenue for healing. Boscov's photographs depict water, flowers, trees, and sky in soothing arrays. In conjunction, pieces like C. J. Spataro's "AD ME REDEO" probe topics like how breathing in sea air can be liberating and freeing in brief, resonant form. Here and elsewhere, potential coping strategies are detailed, with processes as accessible as applying makeup or wearing clothing to feel sexy, taking solitary walks on quiet beaches, and bird-watching. The writers detail hiking and paying attention to flora and fauna, doing meaningful volunteer or paid work, and spending time with cherished friends. It is asserted that laughter also helps.

Pairing poetic microessays with natural images, the soothing collection *Healing Visions* seeks to counter pain with beauty, charting the benefits of starting a new romance, extending kindness to strangers, and meditating and exercising.

ELEANOR BADER (April 21, 2023)

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