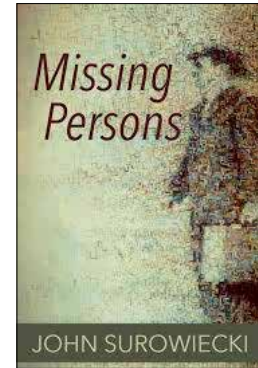


Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Missing Persons by John Surowiecki
Farmington, ME: Encircle Publications, 2015
ISBN -13 978-1-893035-30-0
ISBN -10: 1-89303530-1
23 p \$12.95



Reviewed by Susan LaFortune

John Surowiecki's beautiful collection of elegy poems "Missing Persons" is the 2015 winner of the Encircle Publications Chapbook Contest. All sixteen of these pieces have been published before, in such literary journals as Alaska Quarterly Review, Nimrod and Tupelo Quarterly 5. Mr. Surowiecki is no stranger to poetry fame with four full length poetry collections and seven chapbooks, his awards and recognitions are great, but what he presents to us in this latest collection is a theme often uncelebrated, a tribute to loss.

Within the poems of "Missing Persons" he creates characters and moments so real and full of life that his remembrance of them is one glorious last breath. The people here ponder the loss of others as well as their own youth; as in his opening poem "Her Lear" in which a woman comes to realize her own aging as she considers the wear of her favorite book:

*"She can't remember when
it lost its cover or when
its spine cracked or its
yellowing pages browned"*

She continues to contemplate what this means for her and her book:

*"Promises her Lear will never
be Lear, forsaken on a trash heap.
It still rages, still warehouses
rags and disguises,"*

With this collection of poetry Mr. Surowiecki takes great care that none of these pieces will be forgotten. He composes stanzas eloquently written as in "Janice, Who Was Tall" and breathes life into the line:

"She was our beautiful crane."

and continues with a heartbreaking description of her death:

*"and we were so saddened by the news: it was as if someone
had put our lovely bird in a cage and tossed it into the air
and expected her to fly and carry the cage along with her."*

Another beautifully written poem, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" is an elegy for love or lack of believing in what love is:

*"She said Love was a statue made of air,
a garden without soil: only the anticipation that preceded it,
the longing for it, the need for it, were real; and so were
the bitterness and penance that followed it and now and then
the sense that you'd been robbed of everything you ever owned."*

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Some poems in this collection are about other kinds of loss, a more collective sadness brought from tragedy. Mr. Surowiecki creates a horrifying scene yet offers hope in the end of his line from the poem "Hartford Circus Fire (1944)"

"that elephants strolled to safety, nose to tail, while mothers ran in savage circles clawing each other to death and only the luckiest babies were yanked through slits of canvas as if fireborn."

He offers this same hope in the poem "At the United Mine Workers Monument to the Victims of the Ludlow Massacre, Ludlow, Colorado" He describes the monument as it is now.

"The air is just air, the woods are just woods. The clouds that move across the sky aren't unfamiliar. We know what the wind is. We understand how the earth absorbs."

Three of Mr. Surowiecki's poems come to us in the way of music, "The Accordionist at Nineteen", "Chopin: Mazurka in A Minor, Op17, No 4", and "Aunt Annie (Four Last Songs)".

It has been said that one of Chopin's greatest losses was in having to leave his homeland of Poland and never return. Mr. Surowiecki brings to life this grief as Chopin did with his music. Experiencing both together creates a brilliant sadness, beautifully remembered.

"Aunt Annie (Four Last Songs)" perfectly ends this collection for us, by opening with the Epigraph "Dying is just as I composed it." by composer Richard Strauss

"Four Last Songs" were Strauss's final work and he never lived to see its premier. Herman Hesse was so inspired by "Four Last Songs", he wrote three poems Spring, September, and Going to Sleep, while Joseph von Eichendorff wrote At Sunset. Our poet, Mr Surowiecki, found inspiration from these poems and wrote his own, staying close the key ideas and images found in the originals. Savor this final poem as it is the last bit of breath in this book:

"A nurse says darkness arrives earlier this time of year and she says pretty soon it'll be there from the start."

John Surowiecki's poems in "Missing Persons" are alive and breathing. Elegant yet tragic, this chapbook is full of life and its little death is the ending of this beautiful collection.

SUSAN LAFORTUNE's first chapbook, *Talking in my Sleep*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2013 and was nominated for a pushcart prize. Her poetry has appeared in various publications including *Muddy River Poetry Review* and *Ibbetson Street Magazine*. She is a member of Somerville's Bagel Bards.