

The Healing Power of Poetry



By Sonja Jean Craig

“Poetry is not simply a way of saying things;
it is also a way of seeing things.”
—M.B. McLatchey

On October 2, 2024, the Atlantic Center for the Arts hosted Healing Power of Mindfulness, an evening of women’s health and breast cancer care. The evening began with a mindful meditation from Eve Payor to ground the space. Dinner was catered by Cafe Del Sol in New Smyrna Beach. A panel of medical professionals from AdventHealth, New Smyrna Beach spoke about the medical journey of breast cancer. They started with the diagnosis. Doctors explained the various treatments such as surgery, radiation, and finishing with reconstruction. They were candid about the risks. Each speaker described the technical advances and the emotional support they provided.

Open the curtain to the new ordinary. See the luminous.

FSPA Chancellor, M.B. McLatchey, illustrated the power of poetry as an ally in the healing process. The participant heard two poems that MB selected. She asked them to read and reflect. They shared personal stories. Some went through the cure of cancer, some were caregivers.

There is a difference between healing and curing.



The first poem
was about support.

First Lesson

Lie back daughter, let your head
be tipped back in the cup of my hand.
Gently, and I will hold you. Spread
your arms wide, lie out on the stream
and look high at the gulls. A dead-
man's float is face down. You will dive
and swim soon enough where this tidewater
ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe
me, when you tire on the long thrash
to your island, lie up, and survive.
As you float now, where I held you
and let go, remember when fear
cramps your heart what I told you:
lie gently and wide to the light-year
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

by Philip Booth, from *Lifelines:
selected Poems 1950-1999*

The next poem was written by a doctor/ poet who
expressed his experience with cancer patients.

Hospice Rounds

One looks at me as from a distance.
Another does not cry; "It's only pain,"
she says, as if cancer were just a nuisance
one looks at square, from a distance.
Outside the window, sunshine, like persistence.
Yet how Bach from the radio seems like rain.
She looks at me. From this great distance
I'm another who cannot cry. Or feel pain.

by Rafael Campos, from *Comfort
Measures Only: New and Selected Poems*

The stories were moving. Tears were
shed. MB easily made the participants
comfortable to feel safe sharing their
personal feelings. It was a testament of
how poetry can enhance well-being in
those who face difficult health issues and
those that care for them. MB left the group
with an invitation to write a poem of their
own. The healing continues...

FSPA maintains a partnership with Arts
and Wellness, the community arts events
of Atlantic Center for the Arts. MB is an
Arts and Wellness Ambassador. As such,
she works with veterans and facilitates a
yearly poetry workshop.

Eve Payor, Community Arts Director,
explains, "ACA Community Arts has
been creating innovative resources in
Arts & Wellness for over a decade. This
is an exciting moment in history to be
advocating for the arts as a vital key to
livable communities and better quality of
life. Atlantic Center for the Arts is proud
to collaborate with our local healthcare
providers AdventHealth to support holistic
health. Volusia County Poet Laureate M.B.
McLatchey has specialized knowledge to
share poetry with our community, helping
a wider audience use this artform for
healing, self-care, and connection."

"God is in our daily duties" —Dante