in the glint of broken glass sue ann gleason in the glint of broken glass

Praise for In the Glint of Broken Glass

Fiercely beautiful and politically poignant, Sue Ann Gleason writes the kinds of poems you can't turn away from, nor would you want to. These poems are medicine for the people, for all of us who have stumbled through the last few years — the pandemic and its soundtrack of divisive politics, authoritarianism, violence, disdain for nature and the climate.

These poems are elegant and direct. Sue Ann takes to the page the way a swordswoman picks up her sword: eyes poised, heart open, never missing the mark, never mincing words, always letting us know exactly what she sees, while keeping an eye out for beauty, which is everywhere, and might even save us.

> —Laurie Wagner 27 Powers

Sue Ann Gleason's poetry touches me deeply. She captures the beauty and angst of modern life, in stanzas that are luminous & accessible. Her celebration of the natural world and the delights of home serve as counterpoints to the chaotic political and pandemic landscape that we also inhabit.

-Susann Gerstein

Community Activist and Founding President of the Reston Historic Trust & Museum The poems in *In the Glint of Broken Glass* are visual and heartfelt. I found myself nodding in affirmation as I read. There is both a personal reality and a shared reality when a nation experiences an event like Covid-19. Sue Ann walks us through both. Like so many, she found solace on walks and in nature which her poems reflect so beautifully. It's a tale of difficult, uncertain times with flashes of determination and hope.

> —Caren Albers author of *Homecoming, Happiness Junkie,* and *Married to a Vegan*

Sue Ann Gleason's collection of writing has the spark and crackle of flint—she is feisty and unsparing in her critique of modern politics and the social ills of these times—and yet there's a gustatory fleshiness moving through these poems and narrative works, as if she's reminding us to breathe, to eat, to listen to the birds and "watch for the light in the magic hour," to enjoy and take care of each other. *In the Glint of Broken Glass* offers an intimate, provocative and reflective commentary of pandemic uncertainty, but it equally holds the timeless pleasure and nourishment of the "tiny luminous moment[s]" that remind us of the daily blessings of living. Reading, one feels companioned in a journey that could so easily fall into isolation; Sue Ann's buffet of words feels awash in plenitude, truth, and—dare I say—hope.

—Maya Stein author of *The Poser, 38 Portraits Reimagined*

This is a magnificent work in service to life and to our legacy — I couldn't stop reading it. (When was the last time you couldn't stop reading a book of poetry?)

In the Glint of Broken Glass is an extraordinary anthology. Sue Ann's writing is a snapshot in words through a brilliant lens of perception, capturing the full spectrum of subtle details, resolute shadows, and the brash palette of a world gone mad. Her poetry carries us into the heart of human existence, the living pulsation of what we lived in 2020. Yet, rather than finding the horror we imagine, we are carried into the nature of existence, the dimensionality of our human story. The beautiful and the terrible. I will be sharing this book with my entire family and asking them to pass it on to their children. This is the snapshot of 2020 I want to leave future generations.

—Kathleen Prophet author of Archetypal Astrology, Tales of the Wild Mother and Myths of her Finno-Ugric Ancestor

This collection is a penetrating shaft of light illuminating a path through the darkness of these times, to recognize moments of awe waiting to surprise us and "bring us to our knees."

-Robin Staadecker, Ph.D

Many years ago, a therapist asked me a question I've carried ever since: *How do you move through fear?* The pandemic, and now Sue Ann Gleason's extraordinary debut collection, returned me to that question and offered, if not an answer, two things perhaps more powerful than answers: Companionship in exploring a sometimes unfathomable landscape of isolation, loss, and uncertainty, and a reminder that showing up to the page is one way of moving through fear that never lets us down.

The poems here, many inspired by other poets, add to a collective conversation that chronicles how to stay connected to the humanity of our own aching hearts amidst so much soul-crushing news. Without sugarcoating despair or bypassing anger, Gleason's spacious, deeply attentive poems tether her — and her readers — to what remains beautiful and hopeful in the brokenness. I am so grateful this book exists and will return to it often for courage and comfort alike.

> —Jena Schwartz author of *Don't Miss This* and *The Inside of Out*

in the glint of broken glass

SUE ANN GLEASON

In memory of Judye Lynn Heitfield and her lifelong commitment to activism

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Contents

Prologue
Sorrow Singing
This Poem Cannot
The Farmer's Market
Things to Do in the Midst of a Pandemic
Loneliness
Wild Turkey
Dreams that Loop
And for a Tiny Luminous Moment
Fear
What Now, What Next?
Karma in the Apocalypse
You Just Have to Look
That Kind of Grace
All She Wanted
Light Shows and Lingering
Grace
Sustenance
By Nothing I Mean Everything
Something Will Be Born From This
The Heart Remembers
What I Know
Election Pending
Joy is the Taste of Tears
Altars of Remembrance

A Poem Doesn't Care
The Year 2020
Who Is This Woman?
Pins and Needles
Walking in the Dark
Thank You
Note to Self
Pinprick of Light
Those Beautiful Days
Onward
Onward – Take 2
Begin Again
The Insurrection
Breathe
Still Alive
Let the Celebration Begin
Permission
Ask Me
Today's Hope
Drops of Rain
My Earthly Sacrament
Epilogue – The Illusion of an Ending
Acknowledgements
About the Author

Prologue

It is February 29, 2020. We are on the precipice of a pandemic and we have a president* who seems more concerned about preserving his ego than the safety and security of the American people. He is calling the Coronavirus a hoax at rallies designed to gin up support among his followers.

Vice President Mike Pence, tasked with leading the US government response to this virus, has shifted his attention from the "Space Force," to managing a public health crisis. This is the same Mike Pence who, as recently as the year 2000, was claiming cigarettes did not cause cancer.

On this date only 426 people in the United States have been tested thus far and word is out that the tests are questionable. Therefore, we have no idea the degree of silent infection we're facing or how rapidly it will spread.

My life is becoming consumed with worry as I track the COVID-19 cases around the world on the Johns Hopkins CSSE website. On March 9, 2020 there are 3,892 deaths globally. On March 18, just nine days later, that number has more than doubled to 8,244 deaths, and we are in full lockdown.

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Throughout my life I've turned to words for companionship. As a child I lost myself in books, largely to mitigate the stormy nature of my mother's moods. When I wasn't reading, I was writing – from those early diaries with the little gold key to journals filled with wonderings, worries, and wishes.

This past year, the politics of the period, intensified by a deadly pandemic, was no different. During a time of cultural, sociological and psychological despair, I turned to the words of writers and poets who have held my hand for decades. I read their words. I wrote my own. Poetry became a companion, a place of investigation, an entry point for my own writing. It allowed me to examine both the angst I was feeling on any given day, and also, what sustained me.

Poetry as solace. Poetry as portal.

I wrote my way through extreme personal isolation and collective outrage. And in that writing, I found myself looking for pinpricks of light while learning how to navigate the contradictions of the times. Many days I found myself grief-stricken, some days hopeless, and on occasion, steeped in incandescent anger at the predicament we faced in the hands of a largely inept administration. If you haven't already guessed, I am someone who voices my opinions. I take stands. I have positions. This collection reflects not only my own anguish but the impossible balancing act that so many of us shared. It is unapologetically political.

This book contains slices and snippets from a much larger body of writing. It's a chronology, a year of poems and prayers, meditations and sorrows, a call to slow down and truly honor my profound sadness, discomfort and distress. It reflects that part of me endlessly searching for pinpricks of light despite the angst, and finding myself in the stillness of a life that is, indeed, still quite beautiful.

My writing life continues. The pandemic continues. Only now I see that I have both the resilience and tenacity to withstand any obstacle I face.

Sorrow Singing

April 1, 2020

I want to believe that people are finding their way through. That even fear can be a fruitful quest that informs a decision that could save a life.

I trust each individual is on a journey and it is not my job to wish them a different path. I see the world through the lens of my history; who is to say it's the most credible view?

I expect the earth will find an opening, recover as humankind scrambles to save its own species. Wildlife will look on in wonder as crowds thin and traffic ebbs and flowers bloom regardless.

How do we embrace all the emotions that arise in these times? Every feeling an affirmation of the depth of the human condition.

How blessed to be on a journey that calls us to live in the mystery.

This Poem Cannot

April 24, 2020

This poem cannot turn the clock back. It can't reassemble the pandemic response team this administration destroyed, or send those scientists back to China to monitor global health threats *before* they spin out of control.

This poem cannot unearth the report that the Obama administration delivered to the Trump administration with every expectation *someone* would be interested enough to read it, take it seriously, continue the work of preparing for a global pandemic.

This poem cannot bring back all the people who have died from this miserable disease the five year old child, the ballroom dancer, the musician, the artist, the writer, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient, the holocaust survivor.

The holocaust survivor.

This poem cannot bring back the grandmothers or grandfathers, the brothers and sisters, the parents, their children. It cannot change the fact that these individuals are dying horrendous deaths alone

in hospitals tended by dedicated doctors and exhausted nurses in hazmat suits.

This poem cannot change the course of a pandemic or how individuals respond to it. It cannot infuse compassion into citizens, or caring into cousins who *still* believe the lies.

Who still believe the lies.

The Farmer's Market

April 26, 2020

In 20 years when someone asks me, "What was it like? How did you survive that global pandemic?" I'll tell them about the day I stood in line at the farmers market, how a man scolded me for standing 'too far' from the person in front of me. How I didn't understand what he was saying because it was raining and I had a hood over my head and a mask attached to my face and I couldn't wrap my brain around the fact that I was being admonished for placing 'too much' distance between us.

How I looked at the ground and tried to calculate the distance, certain that I was six feet away, when he yelled in my ear, "Six feet is TWO steps, TWO steps!" How at that point I could no longer see clearly and I didn't know if it was the steam from my breathing or the tears collecting behind the lens of my glasses because then –

He insisted on standing right behind me, just TWO steps away and I could almost feel his breath on my neck and the tears most likely had nothing at all to do with this bully [former road rage now presenting as 'line' rage] but rather, a cellular memory of being chastised as a child for nothing other than the foul mood of my mother on a particularly turbulent day. Or maybe it was the loss I felt at what was once the most nourishing activity of my week – shopping in the open air at a farmers market, channeling my father, my grandmother, my favorite aunts, the kitchen whisperers.

In 20 years when someone asks me, "What was it like? How did you survive that global pandemic?" I'll tell them about walking over to the coffee roaster's table and, out of habit, purchasing a cup of coffee and then realizing just as she began pouring the cream that my face was covered in a mask and there were multiple bags hanging over my arms and I was still reeling from the man who yelled at me in line when I noticed that this barista was selling another kind of brew. "I'll take a bottle of that bourbon, too."