



Blue Peninsula: Essential Words for a Life of Loss and Change

Madge McKeithen

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"My son's illness is eight years old and has no name. It started when he was fourteen. He is now twenty-two. It is taking away his ability to walk and to reason. It is getting worse, some years more rapidly than others."

These words begin the first section of *Blue Peninsula*, a narrative of a son's degenerative illness in thirty-three parts focused around poems that have provided companionship and sustenance to the author. When multiple diagnostic avenues delivered no explanation for the worsening disabilities of her older son, Ike, Madge McKeithen "became a poetry addict--collecting, consuming, ripping poems out of magazines, buying slender volumes that would fit in my pocket or pocketbook, stashing them in loose-leaf notebooks, on shelves, stacking them on the floor. In the midst of all this grief, I had fallen in love. With words. Poems, especially. And just in time."

McKeithen draws on a wonderfully wide ranging group of poets and lyricists--including Emily Dickinson, the Rolling Stones, Paul Celan, Bruce Springsteen, Marie Howe, Walt Whitman, and many others--to illuminate, comfort, and help to express her sorrow. Some chapters are reflections on friendships and family relationships in the context of a chronic and worsening illness. Some consider making peace with what life has dealt, and others value intentionally reworking it.

Not written to suggest easy solace, this powerful work aims to keep company, as would any individual whose loved one is on a course in which the only way out is through.

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