

Questions For

Monday, November 23, 2009 | by VIRGINIA BUNKER

An active participant in Tacoma’s literary scene, Tammy Robacker has been writing poems and keeping journals from a young age — at one point she even slept with Robert Louis Stevenson’s Child’s Garden of Verses under her pillow. Now she has a book of her own.



Photo by Chona Kasinger

The title of your book is *The Vicissitudes*. What does it mean? By definition, “vicissitudes” means “successive or changing phases or conditions, as of life or fortune; ups and downs.” And my poems are little slices of those ups and those downs. Reward comes with loss. Beauty comes with ugliness. Love comes with hate. Clarity comes with confusion. That dichotomy factors heavily in my work.

Your book includes some emotionally difficult material, yet the cover is very pretty. What were your intentions with the book jacket, designed by Martin McClellan? I wanted a book cover that would make opening the book feel like opening an indulgent box of candy, or a jewelry box, or a fancy cosmetics case — I wanted it to be something beautiful, even though some of the poems that make it up are very ugly inside. And that is why I put a bee on the cover too. It adds a bit of sting or edginess to the art’s “pretty” implication. I like that irony. I wanted that connection for people — especially women.

You are very revealing in your work. Are you equally honest in everyday life? I have been told I wear my heart on my sleeve, and these days I consider it a compliment. When I was a child, I felt bad about being so sensitive. But now I like who I am. I like being free to say what I mean and to honestly address matters of the heart.

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Where did you go to college? When did poetry enter the picture? I thought I was going to be a hairstylist. I went to beauty school at seventeen and then did hair for a couple years. But the spiral perms lost their magic for me. At nineteen I decided I wanted to study poetry. I earned my BA in Creative Writing at Evergreen State College.

What can poetry offer readers that other literary forms can't? The language of poetry is unique and important universally because it gives a personal voice to what is often unsayable in our human experience. Poetry is an artistic expression that encourages all cultures to articulate the sentiments of the soul.

You volunteer for Puget Sound Poetry Connection and Exquisite Disarray. How can interested parties join the conversation? PSPC hosts a Distinguished Writer series and open mic every second Friday at King's Books. Tacoma offers a lot of writing talent. Come show your skills off!

What do you like to do when you aren't writing? I'm a total foodie. I love to cook and experiment with new recipes or exotic ingredients. It's another area of creativity for me. I also love talking on the phone. My cell phone bill is off the hook, no pun intended.

Robacker's book is available online and at King's Books. Her Web site is tammyrobacker.com.

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