

# HEARTACHE AND POETRY

By Sandy Bernstein

And so I stand at an unmarked grave  
Hoping time may change us  
Uncertain of our demise,  
And set a new course,  
Yet I feel the heavy burden of grief  
Pulling me down as surely as if the soil  
Had been tossed onto a waiting casket.  
And the cold rain feels like tiny daggers  
Upon my cheeks  
As my tears mix with the melting drops;  
I realize I have come here  
Not to bury our history,  
But to mourn the passing of friendship.

This is the last stanza of a poem I wrote entitled, "Cold Rain." The poem is written in free verse and contains several stanzas. Sadly, the subject deals with the end of a long time friendship, which served as a source of inspiration. The silver lining in this otherwise black cloud produced a wealth of poetry, including an award-winning poem that was published in an anthology.

Heartache and poetry go together like tea and cake. "Sometimes we must swallow the bitter with the sweet," my mother often said. I learned at an early age how to churn raw emotion into the craft of poetry. I take life's knocks by listening to my inner voice, which often supplies fodder for my best work. I believe attitude is what truly separates the strong from the weak. Those who have no creative or spiritual outlet for their emotions usually end up suffering needlessly. If only they knew the secret.

Writing poetry helps me deal with life's ups and downs. Unfortunately, it's during the tough times when I'm at my best, poetically speaking. In fact, the more gut wrenching the experience, the better the verse. Granted, this takes a toll on your nervous system, but once the beast is slain, peace usually follows. Writing in one's own blood is a catharsis, but sharpening your wit along with your pencil by coming clean emotionally is nothing new. Poets have been doing it for centuries, and now this form of self-expression is the latest trend in psychology. Writing is often prescribed as therapy for people who need to explore their true feelings. Since most people reject the idea of getting in touch with their inner selves, it's hard for them to express their deepest emotions in a positive way. Admittedly, I find it easier to write when I'm sad or depressed. Unburdening the soul is a great tool for self-discovery. It's usually during the initial writing

process when I learn how I truly feel. But what about getting thoughts down when things are going well? How many of us write when we're truly happy?

Sometimes ideas blossom into something positive after germinating from a negative seed. Good things do come from heartache and frustration, but the reward is even better when you're proud of the work and can share it with others through publication or public readings. Luckily, I've had the pleasure of doing both. But how do you tap into those nerve endings in the first place, and how do you set about crafting such a heartfelt poem?

The answer is different for everyone. First, like it or not, you must come to terms with your emotions. Search the depth and breadth of your soul; know the extreme highs and lows. It isn't easy opening a vein, but eventually the storm clouds break up and a clearer sky emerges. The real trick is knowing when to let go, and when to write what you're feeling. My philosophy is not to dwell in one place too long, but write when you are emotionally charged. Get those initial thoughts down, then sift through the rubble to see what needs to be discarded. You can always go back later. Writing from heartache does have its advantages. The question is, will you be better off purging your system this way? Only you can answer that. Every poet has their own way of crafting a poem. I only know what works for me. Think about this: What other form of writing forces you to be brutally honest with yourself, then demands you put that truth in a concise form? The faster and more efficiently you deal with life's little surprises, the more time you have for other things, like accepting awards for your poetry.

---

SANDY BERNSTEIN is an editor and co-founder of SOUR GRAPES, an online and in-print Poetry magazine, a quarterly newsletter for writers and editors.

SOUR GRAPES website can be found on line at <http://members.aol.com/sgrapes> E-mail can be addressed to [SandyBerns@aol.com](mailto:SandyBerns@aol.com) or "snail mail" addressed to: Sour Grapes, Sandy Berns, 26 Sheridan St., Woburn, Ma 01801-3542.

From POETRY -  
SPRING 1999