BOOKS I HAVE READ: WE ARE THE WINTER PEOPLE

Posted on September 14, 2021 by Eddie

A remarkable book of poems, by an even more remarkable young poet.
Category: Observations

A decade or so ago, when I was fairly new to Twitter, I came across Jenny Rowberry (@stroopwaffle). Jenny is a young woman, with a great sense of humour, an encyclopaedic knowledge of science fiction TV shows and a huge love for athletics. She was also confined to bed with severe ME. Despite her condition, Jenny was a funny, interesting and well worth a Twitter follow. Her tweets quickly became one of the highlights of social media.

In the years since then, Jenny's condition has steadily worsened;

> *In May 2015, after genetic testing, Jenny was also diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome. This genetic disorder causes the body to produce faulty collagen. The biggest problem for Jenny is that the faulty collagen causes the ligaments and connective tissue in her neck to be lax, which means that it canâ€™t support the spine or skull. So the vertebrae and skull move around and subluxate (subluxation is like dislocation) and blood flow is severely reduced, causing increasing numbness.*
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> *This neck instability became life-threatening and Jenny had to have an operation in January 2020 to try to fuse her neck in place to save her life, as well as a decompression surgery for Chiari Malformation. Unfortunately the fusion surgery was not a success and Jenny became a lot more disabled and itâ€™s too dangerous for her to move her neck or head at all. The only neurosurgeon in the world who specialises in fusion (and fusion revision) surgeries and invasive bolt traction testing to determine the correct fusion position for highly complex Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome patients, is in the USA. Jenny is clinging to life by the skin of her teeth and has been trying to hang on for over a year while trying to fundraise enough money for the three surgeries that this neurosurgeon has said Jenny needs to have a hope of staying alive and regaining some sort of quality of life.*
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> *...Only a patch of ceiling directly above Jenny is within her field of vision. The only part of her body that sheâ€™s seen since the operation are her hands, which she can raise to her eyes to see but she canâ€™t look down to see anything else. Sheâ€™s rarely able to look at the screen of her phone, even though she tries to hold it up directly above her head to put it in her field of vision, because doing so damages her neck more. So she has been completely cut off from the world and from other people. Her only solace has been audiobooks.*

Among her other accomplishments, Jenny is a talented poet and she has recently released a book of her collected poems, We Are The Winter People. The anthology includes poems she wrote before falling ill and others that talk about her wrestling with the pain and frustration of her situation. In a typical twist, they aren't arranged chronologically, so the reader has to guess which ones were

written when.

There is a purpose behind this publication:

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This is a worthwhile book in two ways. Firstly, and most importantly, the poetry is good. It is well worth a read on its own merits. Secondly, by buying a copy, you can help raise funds for Jenny's much needed surgery.

Jenny is a Christian, but hers is not the easy, triumphalist faith that many of us encounter. She has had to wrestle with the dark realities of life and a God who doesn't seem to intervene when she desperately wants him to. At times, her poetry is understandably bleak, but a chink of light shines through.

Held

Pinned here
I kid and scream
try to punch my way out.
But your arms are too strong.

Pinned here
I sulk and ignore you,
try to freeze you out.
But you are too patient.

Pinned here

I spit and abuse you,
try to provoke you.
But your love is too great.

Pinned here
I cry,
break your heart with my pain.
But you will not let me go.

Pinned here,
too exhausted to wrestle anymore.
In the stillness I see
I'm in an embrace, not a headlock.

Blur

Waiting, waiting,
just riding out the days,
waiting for them to come to pass
one
after another
and then
the next
and the day after,
over and over
indefinitely
lolling by
merging together,
watching the months simultaneously fly
and crawl.
During it
each hour lasts a year,
looking back
each year lasts an hour.

If you buy Jenny's book using the link I provided at the top of the page, my Amazon affiliates page will give me a small sum (a few pence). I've no desire to make anything from this page and I will ensure that I give more money to Jenny's go fund me page, than I receive from the book sales. Oh, if

you don't want the book, you could just make a gift anyway.