CL
BLEDSOE
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It’s Snowing Inside My Daughter’s Head

And in her eyes. I can see the flecks reflected
when she smiles, each a perfect, individual

normalcy. *Huffington Post* ran a piece
on negligent parents who don’t shovel

the walkway from their children’s smiles
to the outside world so that a thick crust of ice

forms between father and daughter, mother
and son, and every time they try to bond, someone

slips and bruises a knee. This is the problem
with Gen Xers; we know how to shovel

but can’t break the ice. I never meant to read
so much it ruined my eyes so I couldn’t see

you. It was poor planning, bad advice. A cartoon
in the *New Yorker* said I’m doing everything

wrong, and I don’t even have a subscription.
Someone just keeps leaving them in my mailbox.
Author Notes

CL Bledsoe is the author of eight books, most recently the poetry collection *Riceland* and the novel *Man of Clay*. Bledsoe lives with his daughter in Alexandria, VA.

About the Work

This poem came from my experiences trying to be a good parent. From the day my daughter was born—really before she was born—people, strangers—have been telling me how to be a parent, usually without actually knowing the specifics of my or my daughter’s situation, and frequently without invitation. There’s a vast amount of marketing put out to feed on the fears of parents. If you don’t buy certain products and do certain things, you are a terrible parent, a horrible human being, and your child will suffer, will have disadvantages, these advertisements and people often come right out and say, even when, in reality, some of these products are actually harmful to children. It can be difficult to quell these fears, but it’s necessary for a parent to trust his or her instincts. The poem is hyper-honest to such an extreme degree that it transcends rational fears and crosses over into absurdity; the narrator of the poem listens to all these marketers and is crippled with fear and self-doubt because of it, and we, the readers, can shake our heads at it, but secretly we feel these same fears.

The most difficult part of writing this poem was achieving the proper tone. I didn’t want the narrator to simply whine or express doubts; the tone had to go far beyond that to push the situation into absurdity in order to match the absurdity of these mixed messages. To achieve this, I simply channeled my own fears to an extreme degree. I listened to the marketers telling me that I was a failure, a bad parent, etc. Of course, an awful lot of parents DO listen to the marketers. Some parents plop their kids in front of educational television programming, and others refuse to let their kids interact with technology until they’re older. Some buy gas-guzzling SUVs to be safer in traffic, and reinforce gender roles so the kids will be “normal,” as if the worst thing a child can be is different. And this is the lie in our ideals, isn’t it? Being different might seem like one of the worst things a kid can be, to the kid; the reality is that we don’t live in an egalitarian society. For me, being different meant being picked on. But being normal meant mind-numbing boredom in the working-world. So which path should I be trying to set my kid upon?

This is something I couldn’t resolve in the poem, because it’s not something that can be resolved in life. Life is far more complicated than that. Poetry isn’t meant to sum up a situation in a neat argument, but rather to explode seemingly simple things and show their true complexity. Poetry is an opportunity to examine the vastly complicated emotional reactions we have to the world; poetry lets us question the world in an attempt to learn how to live, how to be human.

CL Bledsoe on the Web

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