

chicken pox / not rape” (33). The speaker describes the dark moment that connects the two women: “Bedsheets soaked in cold sweat / girl screaming help with no voice ... eyes black / pool of crimson blood / between my legs, her legs” (34). Later the speaker recalls her own experience of violation: “I was cornered in a parking lot / his thick hands, my back pushed against brick” (39).

The third section, “Letters Home,” is an alphabet acrostic (sometimes called an abcdarium) in which each letter of the alphabet begins a new stanza of the poem. The letters mirror the daughter’s journey: they take flight as the daughter leaves, carrying the mother’s hopes, wishes, and fears for the daughter’s well-being into the world and back home. The mother mourns her daughter’s departure even as she understands its purpose and necessity in establishing female autonomy: “Once upon a time / you would have liked me, / a time before I was your mother / a time when I was a girl / who wanted to leave home” (59).

The fourth and final section, “Slipping the Blindfold,” examines a grown woman’s life, with poems on marriage, illness, friendships, sexual desire, and domestic arrangements: “Sharon’s lost interest in cooking and sex / so you’d think Jim would lose interest in Sharon / but turns out she married a resourceful man / who now goes to market on Saturdays” (71). The first poem in this section, “Fabric,” describes the generational continuity that binds mothers and daughters even as daughters ceaselessly create new patterns: “We are the daughters of thread-and-needle mothers / women who stitched their lives from a pattern ... cut” (67).

Lawrence, a development officer for the Royal University Hospital Foundation, is the author of a previous collection of poetry, *Ring Finger, Left Hand*, which won the First Book Award at the Saskatchewan Book Awards. Her new book is a valuable addition to the literature on mother-daughter relationships, women’s friendships, and complex relationships that resonate in women’s lives.

## **Embracing Brings You Back**

Pat Clifford.

Regina: Coteau Books, 2006.

### **Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva**

*Embracing Brings You Back* is a collection of poetry that describes the journey of ovarian cancer survivor Pat Clifford. The poems could easily have become maudlin and sentimental, but Clifford’s work resonates with powerful images and poignant lines. Here, the poet braves the possibility of her death and laments the loss of women who succumb to ovarian cancer.

The five-section, thirty-six poem collection describes a range of experiences as Clifford endures the various stages of ovarian cancer. The first section recollects Clifford's initial diagnosis and her numerous treatments. She undergoes rounds of testing and learns the complex medical terms for body parts in "Bilingual:" "I have become / third person to myself, unrecognizable / in surgical syllables, a language life" and "Only a sick woman / knows her tender organs / are held by an apron of fatty tissue tied / in the quaint excess of old world / vowels: oementum." Clifford receives her test results in "March 2002" and learns that she has advanced ovarian cancer.

In the second part of the collection, Clifford blends humour and sadness to reflect upon her physical and emotional transformation from chemotherapy. "The Mind of Death" renders Clifford's great strain to complete everyday tasks, like putting on pajamas: "The too-small opening / flattens my ears forward, stings, pulls / on my hair, and I struggle / to get one arm, then another into the right." Although this section includes many poems that mourn the passing of cancer patients—such as "On Liz, Dying" and "Butterfly Effect"—Clifford concludes with the witty "False Face: Rise" which critiques a call for submission of "inspirational" poetry from cancer survivors. Clifford posits the irony of survivors writing "upbeat, inspirational pieces."

The third section is more deeply concerned with death. "Sitting With Catherine" ends with the stark reminder that everyone dies: "the teaching / You can't stay long." In "False Face: Clinic" a cancer patient dies, even though she has a positive attitude, eats healthily, and uses home remedies: "Two years later, I see her name in a death notice." Yet, cancer survivors fight against death in "Against Time." Clifford also recounts therapeutic moments of spending time with friends and going shopping, since "Life is too damned short / for ugly clothes."

The last two sections return to Clifford's physical changes as she battles cancer. In "Bald," Clifford engages with other women who endure the cycles of hair loss and growth. She also shares her physical and emotional wounds in "Ragged purple scar," "Look Good, Feel Better," and "Venous Refusals." The humorous tone returns when Clifford honours her friend Catherine, a cancer patient, who names her wig Alice in "Sometimes you miss people for the damndest reasons:" "We teased Alice, swore at / our own itchy inability to keep the damned / things on our heads for more / than twenty minutes at a shot." She also honours her cancer survivor friend Kathy who fearlessly flaunts her bald head to a police officer in "Kathy, barrel-assing down a back road:" "If you got it, girl, you flaunt it."

*Embracing Brings You Back* is an engrossing collection of poems that celebrates the triumph of human will.