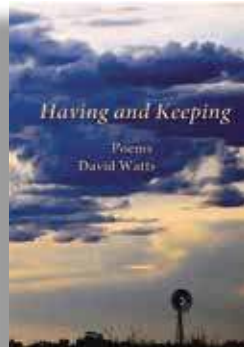


# Reviews and reflections

David Bennahum, MD, and Jack Coulehan, MD, Book Review Editors



## When Human Voices Wake Us

Jerald Winakur  
Kent State University Press, Kent (OH), 2017, 96 pages

## Having and Keeping

David Watts, MD (AQA, Baylor College of Medicine, 1965)  
Brick Road Poetry Press, Columbus (GA), 2017, 97 pages

### Reviewed by Peter Pereira, MD

Jerald Winakur's *When Human Voices Wake Us*, the latest volume from Kent State University's Literature and Medicine series, spans a 40-year career in medicine. Poems such as "First Do No Harm," and "To the Medical Student Who Jumped From the Roof of the Hospital" explore the demands and expectations of medical training. Others like "Blown Pupil," "Breast Exam," "Out of Practice," "A Sigh on Rounds," and "Discharges" explore the challenges and joys of a busy medical practice, and eventual retirement:

I recorded demise  
in a radiant scrawl  
but there were never  
enough flowers.

The medical poems are deepened by poems that explore Winakur's family history. He remembers a beloved

grandmother who died of pancreatic cancer in "Forest Hills Park, Spring 1994," and a father lost to Alzheimer's in "Blue Period," and "Mowing." The poet reveals:

...it must have made him strong  
since he lived long enough  
to forget his name  
and then my own.

There is pathos, as well as humor, in this collection. "Plastic Caskets" takes life-after-death to its absurd limits. "The Teens for Christ Convention at the Holiday Inn" humorously juxtaposes teen celibacy and adult intimacy. "Sideshow" exposes the great circus of for-profit medicine where "poisons/pummel Mister Neoplasia," and "heart-stopping spells/of fatal fibrillation .../shocked and dazzled by joules."

There is an ekphrastic poem with its all too real photograph of an elderly woman alone on a street corner "Raising Money for Medical Bills." And, there are wonderful love poems for Winakur's wife, Lee, "A Paper Anniversary at 52," and "Overwinter."

There is a forward by poet Alan Shapiro, and a introductory essay by the author that incorporates lines from T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as a touchstone for the poet's musings about medical training and a life in medicine. "I was formulated, pinned...patient encounters measured out with coffee spoons...I no longer heard the singing."

Winakur urges physicians to be attentive, and to hear patient's human voices. He also urges physicians to be attentive to their own deepest selves. In "Auscultation" he encourages:

Between the endless rounds  
the endless dyings  
still beats  
a poet's heart.

The doctor's stethoscope, clutched to his own chest is a touching final image that closes the book.