

Poetry that strikes to the heart

Again and again as I read Mike Madill's fine first volume of poetry, I was struck by the honesty and humanity of his poems, and his gift for penning lines that leap from the page. " ... but those hands / even after all their wasting," he writes of his father, dying of cancer, "still big enough / to shelter me from the ricochet of sky." Or, in the portrait he paints of him as a man who could assemble, fix or repair anything with those hands, "You yearned to / rid the world of rust and squeaks." The poems take us on a journey through the suffering, loss and death that all families know without ever descending to the maudlin or the sentimental. Instead, Madill sweeps the reader up with a clarity of heart and an eye for detail that would elude a lesser poet. Recalling his father smoking Viscounts, he writes simply, "The time you'd take/ putting time on hold for a spell." Or in a poem about bypassing a visit to Cape Canaveral, yet capturing its essence anyway, he imagines what it would be like, "To stand there on NASA's historic turf / and gawk at the sheer enormity / of our need to leave home." A good poet can transform the small and universal details of life into the universal. This book does that throughout. Even Madill's poem titles hint at his skills, Red, Indelible, House Arrest, Jesus and the Soap Dish, Deadfall, Freight Train, Shards, Alive, Throat Chakra and If Fried Eggs were Tea Leaves. I found these brave and authentic poems. Poems worth reading. (David Blaikie)