

# View from True North

*Poems by Sara Henning*

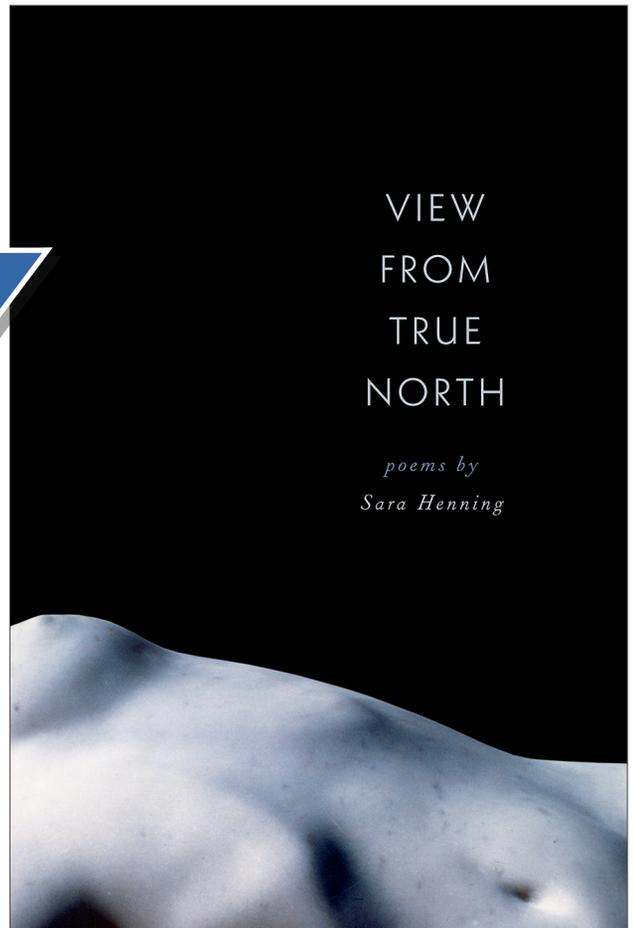
“Sara Henning’s poems search through the past and present, never turning an eye from the pain of loss: a grandfather’s death and a father’s suicide. Both family portrait and mirror, each poem is rendered with lyrical precision and quiet reverie as they present a scarred life, the wounds healing but not yet closed. The speaker here claims to be the ‘heirress of disaster,’ and though much of her inheritance is loss, she shapes it, poem by poem, into strength.”—**Dorianne Laux**, author of *The Book of Men*

## Testifying to the impact of alcoholism, abuse, and sexual repression

In these edgy poems of witness, Sara Henning’s speaker serves as both conduit and curator of the destructive legacies of alcoholism and multigenerational closeting. Considering the impact of addiction and sexual repression in the family and on its individual members, Henning explores with deft compassion the psychological ramifications of traumas across multiple generations.

With the starling as an unspoken trope for victims who later perpetuate the cycle of abuse, suffering and shame became forces dangerous enough to down airliners. The strands Henning weaves—violent relationships, the destructive effects of long-term closeting, and the pall that shame casts over entire lives—are hauntingly epiphanic. And yet these feverish lyric poems find a sharp beauty in their grieving, where *Rolling Stone* covers and hidden erotic photographs turn into talismans of regret and empathy. After the revelation that her deceased grandfather was a closeted homosexual “who lived two lives,” Henning considers the lasting effects of shame in regard to the silence, oppression, and erasure of sexual identity, issues that are of contemporary concern to the LGBTQIA community.

Part eyewitness testimony, part autoethnography, this book of memory and history, constantly seeking and yearning, is full of poems “too brutal and strange to suffer / [their] way anywhere but home.”



Paper: 978-0-8093-3685-2

E-book: 978-0-8093-3686-9

\$15.95, 88 pages

Crab Orchard Series in Poetry

**Sara Henning** is the author of one other poetry book, *A Sweeter Water*. Her poems have appeared in *Quarterly West*, *Witness*, *Passages North*, *Rhino*, *Meridian*, and *Cincinnati Review*. In 2015, she won the *Crazyhorse* Lynda Hull Memorial Poetry Prize. She is a visiting assistant professor of English and creative writing at Stephen F. Austin State University.

To request a review copy, schedule an author for an interview or a signing, or obtain information about course adoption, contact [siupresspublicity@siu.edu](mailto:siupresspublicity@siu.edu)

For rights and permissions inquiries, contact [rights@siu.edu](mailto:rights@siu.edu)

To order  
Online: [www.siupress.com](http://www.siupress.com) · Phone: 1-800-621-2736

Also available at bookstores and online retailers

**SIU** SOUTHERN ILLINOIS  
UNIVERSITY PRESS  
CARBONDALE

## FIRST MURMURATION

When I say a son  
     broken open by his father

is becoming a starling,  
     I mean feathers are unfurling  
 from his skin, and confused

as he is by his wrists  
     uncoiling, by his thumbs

angling into a dirt  
     -flushed twosome of bastard  
 alulae, he imagines

he's only a boy  
     unhitching the day

from his shoulders,  
     boy rushing through a whole  
 fruit orchard of minor

grievances, the sun  
     -bruised flesh of the fallen

scenting the backs  
     of his knees. When I say  
 a son broken open

by his father, I mean  
     a son, not a sweat-split Eden

where *no* only means  
     he's rising through fog,  
 not a sheen of danger,

a canopy of trees  
     silking the soles of his

pollen-luscious feet.  
     When I say a son broken  
 open, I mean

a son shape-shifting  
     past the velvet scrim

of orchard and ether,  
     a son who learns  
 to leave his body

at the first slow pierce  
     of his father's song.

## HOW TO PRAY

*After Marie Howe*

Start with one ear to the ventilation  
 grille to heed your father's saunter, a cadence  
 ending at your brother's bedroom door.

Hold his name on your tongue,  
 then whisper it through galvanized pipes  
 so that its raw silk grieving will

incite the bodies of G.I. Joes strewn  
 in his toy box, turn them to an army of saviors.  
 Let it turn the bicycle chain

lying on his closet floor into a Leviathan.  
 Listen for your father's soft cursing, the aborted  
 snarl of the family dog as its body

hits the floor. Listen for the cry  
 nesting in your brother's throat, the exhausted  
 animal sound only a wounded

body can make. Instead of weeping,  
 draw a map to the tree house you'll build  
 for him out of pallets and ropes

from the shed. Mark true  
 north on his Boy Scout compass in crayon.  
 Years later, at Christmas, buy baskets

of oranges and d'Anjou pears  
 that shine through twists of cellophane.  
 Wrap sprays of ribbon

glitzing at the crown, sign his name  
 to the card beginning *Dear Mom and Dad*.  
 Hope that this opulence will fill

the son-shaped hole pulsing  
 in the living room. If you can beg his last  
 known address from his ex-wife,

write a letter beginning *Dear Brother*,  
 end with *I'm sorry*. Knowing this isn't good  
 enough, start over. Write the word

*brother* over and over until it means  
*love*, until it means *save yourself*, until it means  
*beautiful enough to disappear*.