Gifts of the Body

Gifts of the Body, by Rebecca Brown is a compelling and emotional thriller. Brown does an amazing job in transporting the reader into each and every part of the story. It is almost as though you see what she sees, and you feel what she feels.

Rebecca Brown, is a former home care worker, who worked for the Urban Community Services (UCS) in assisting people with AIDS. Brown divides each chapter to speak of a gift, a gift of the body. She brings you into the lives and rooms of each and everyone of her clients. One of the many shocking moments in the book is under the chapter, “The Gift of Tears”, when you meet one of Brown’s clients named Ed. Ed had been long awaiting a room in the hospice and when he finally received the call that a room was available, he does not want to go. He realizes that if he goes it would be like marking his own death sentence. Ed gets really upset and begins shouting at Brown which was something he never did. Ed’s emotions were just all over the place. Brown describes his eyes, how she could tell he wanted to cry but he could not because the disease had affected his tear ducts, “His mouth was moving.. The rest of him was trying to cry but something was wrong with his tear ducts and he couldn’t” (p.33). One of the other shocking moments is under the chapter, “The Gift of Speech”. Here you meet her patient/friend Rick whom she took breakfast too every morning, specifically cinnamon rolls, Rick’s favorite. They would sit together and have a nice conversation over the breakfast table. Rick became very ill and had to be moved to a hospice to be taken care off. The last time Brown went to see Rick at the hospice she talked and talked and he just listened. After she finished talking, Rick tried to say something but Brown could not make out what he was trying to say, “He said it slow, like I was a beginner at the language: “Ng-mu-shoo”. When it came out that last time I understood. And when I understood I said it back, I said, “I miss you too” (p. 113-114). Towards the end of the story, Brown finds out that one of her closest friends who worked for the UCS acquired AIDS. She is stunned and in disbelief. Brown sobs like a child and realizes that it is different to know someone you know is already sick than to know someone whom you could never imagine being sick.

I highly recommend this book to everyone. It makes you realize the many things we take for granted when we go about our daily lives, not knowing that there are people like Rick and Ed who would give anything to be in our place. After reading this book, the tiny things, like the ability to cry, to feel hungry, to move, seem all so much more meaningful. Brown truly gives you in insight into our bodies gifts but also its failures.

I believe this book is appropriate to read for this class since we talked about HIV/AIDS, specifically in the developing countries. It gives you a deeper insight into the lives of people affected with the disease. You do not just read about AIDS in a textbook, you live the experience through each and everyone of Brown’s ‘clients’ and also their loved ones. This story captivates the true evil of the disease and how disabling it is. Patients can no longer fend for themselves, they need the help and care of others for as long as they can hold on. It truly makes you realize how important it is to find a cure for AIDS because it is undeniably a horrifying way to die.