

Return to poetry

Cardiologist Barry Zaret composes poems about a life in medicine, dusk in the Berkshires, and his late wife.

Every time he updates *Clinical Nuclear Cardiology*, the textbook he co-wrote, Barry L. Zaret, M.D., adds new material. But when he sits down to revise a poem, he does the opposite.

"You start big and you get smaller and smaller," says Zaret, the Robert W. Berliner Professor Emeritus of Medicine,

who was Yale's long-time chief of cardiovascular medicine until 2004. "It has to have the right cadence, and there's got to be an economy of words. It's amazing, the time you can spend on simple changes." He reworks the poem over time. "You need to let the poem mature."

Zaret's first book of poetry, *Journeys*, touches on themes from the writer's Jewish heritage and

a life in medicine, and on the beauty of Massachusetts' Berkshires. Nine poems in a section titled "In the Land of Cancer" tell the story of his wife Myrna's illness and death from cancer in 2010, and of the grief and renewal that followed. Among Zaret's favorite poems in the collection are "My Father's Kosher Butcher Shop"; a description of dusk called "Berkshire Light"; and "Paper Plate Pesach," about his first Passover without Myrna after 47 years of marriage.

Until Zaret returned to poetry eight years ago, he had not written a poem since contributing to his Far Rockaway High School yearbook in 1958. In recent years, he's been setting his alarm for 4:30 a.m. so he can write before heading down to the School of Medicine. Weekends, he paints at his house in the Berkshires. His oil painting, "The Road from St. Remy to Arles," appears on the cover of *Journeys*.

—Cathy Shufro

JOURNEYS



Barry L. Zaret