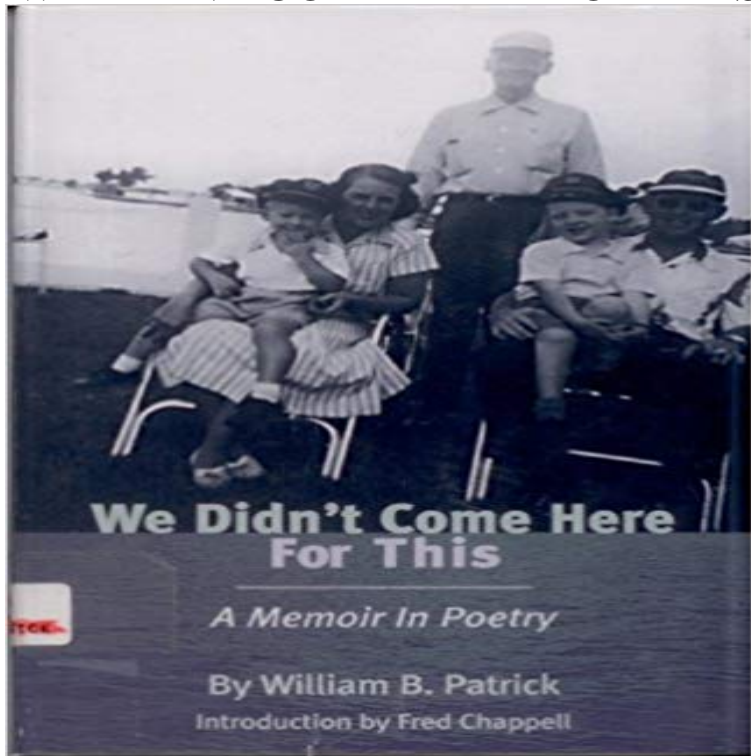


WE DIDNT COME HERE FOR THIS: A MEMOIR IN POETRY



An author of TV scripts, radio plays, fiction, and a few volumes of poetry relies on his dexterity in many genres for this wonderful hybrid: an engaging verse memoir that makes sense of some ordinary lives--the poets family--in Troy, New York, during the 50s and early 60s, a time rendered here without bitterness or nostalgia but in all its messy reality. The 17 long poems in this frank and direct narrative sequence are accompanied by snapshots and dates, and focus on events both traumatic (one infant brothers death, anothers cerebral palsy) and mundane (the poets first Christmas memories, a first-grade spelling bee). Patrick also re-creates life before his arrival: in one poem, his parents (the postwar lovebirds) take turns speaking, she a prim and girlish Catholic, he a tough-talking war vet; in another, Betty, the mother, writes to her best friend after the birth of her first son, Jimmy, a moment of panic and first grumblings about her imperfect marriage; Patrick's father, Big Jim, addresses his firstborn in a poem about the virtues of toughness, and the legacy from his own mean, wife-beating father; and, in a fanciful tour de force, Patrick imagines the trip made by his soul before his own birth. All these voices and themes reverberate throughout this ample volume, then come together in the final piece, a marvelous medley inspired by a visit from Jayne Mansfield to Albany for a CP telethon. Intellectually modest, Patrick never imposes grand meanings on events, nor does he give in to Delmore Schwartz-like cries of anguish at the scenes of his parents lives. Instead, Patrick sways from long to short lines in a voice thats compassionate, fresh and American, without ever proclaiming itself such.

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