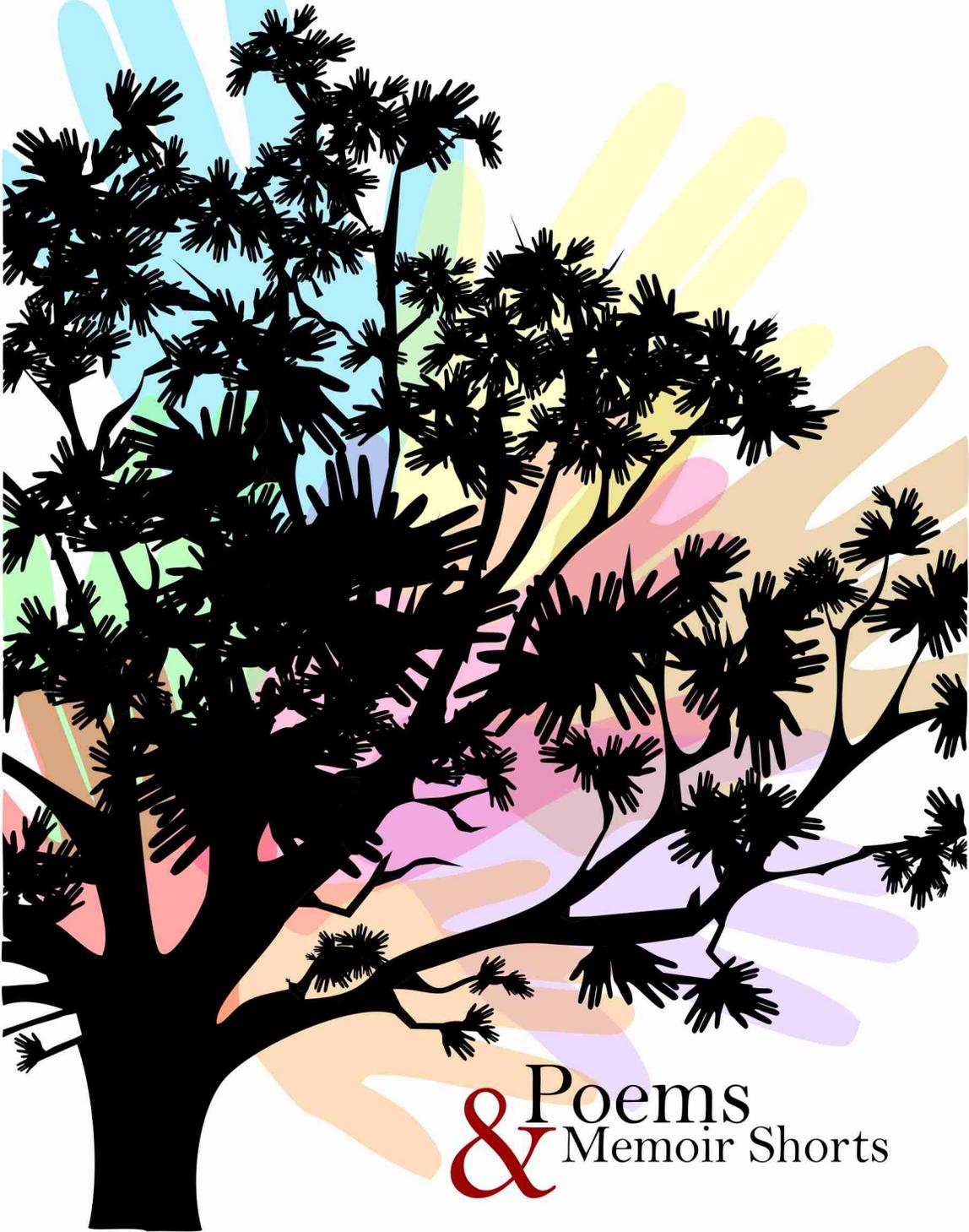


# *Trees have Hands*

Elcia Daniel



*&* Poems  
Memoir Shorts

# **Trees Have Hands**

**Elcia Daniel**

**Poems and Memoir Shorts**

*Trees Have Hands*  
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I am especially grateful to Howard A. Fergus, Montserrat’s renowned scholar, historian and poet, and retired University of the West Indies Professor, for writing the Introduction to this book. I feel greatly honored. I also wish to thank him for editing my work and for his encouragement over the years.

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# Preface

This publication symbolizes the maturity of a dream that I have lived with for many years. I realize that thoughts and dreams can soar at will, but reality begins at the starting-block. Like the persona in my poem: “Simple Pleasure”, I am finally ready to reach those grapes “way at the top”.

The poems in this book have been organized into five sections. Section A contains poems which reflect observations of my youngest granddaughter whose antics and developmental peculiarities at times inspired my Muse. Section B includes poems about the 1995 reawakening of a volcano which had been thought to be extinct. Section C contains tributes in celebration of a few persons – some deceased. The poems contained in Section D seek to reflect the classroom of life itself. In Section E the atmosphere is intended to be carefree and inviting.

In this publication I have also included a prose segment containing some personal memories as well as one fictional short story.

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# Introduction

Elcia Daniel is not a new poet although this is her first book. A seasoned writer disciplined with word and line, she has been anthologized several times since 1990. The poems “Naked Beauty”, “Hope”, “Exodus” and “Break Time” which are among the best in this volume have been previously published by the University of the West Indies Extra-Mural Unit in Montserrat. With *Trees Have Hands*, she makes a strong entrance into the world of book publication as an engaging poet.

“Trees Have Hands”, the title poem exemplifies Daniel’s ability to grip with graphic imagery, and in this particular piece, she sustains the ‘hands’ metaphor throughout and demonstrates her consciousness of life’s ironies, humbug and contradictions. Hands both help and hurt and are more likely to be “greedy and grasping” in cultures of smallness. In spite of the strong philosophical element in the poem or because of it, the emotional content is rich and controlled. The lessons from life in the book, from the literal and proverbial cradle, to the edge of the grave, are golden; and they emanate from child observation, child rearing, the trauma and dislocation of an erupting volcano, break time from the tedium of marking books and luxuriating in the pleasant moods of nature. The volume is small, but compelling and teasing. Daniel, a lifelong educator is apt to teach and extract lessons, but her tactile imagery and keen observation rescues her from undue preachment, though God and moral import lurk beneath the lines.

The book is organized in five sections or movements. Section A. “Turning Pages” treats with the innocence of infancy and the halting but steady efforts to grow up and break out from the crib-cage. This comes with a

consequential loss of innocence, although there is a gain for the adult is reminded of:

What innocence looked like  
What it felt like to laugh.

Innocence gives way to experience (to echo William Blake) with another birth—that of an explosive volcano of stupendous energy. It scatters and rains desolation thereby presenting another side of God. Some join the dance of the Diaspora, while others remained tied to “their paradise”. The ambivalence and uncertainty of paradise is evident and is an example of what makes Daniel an intriguing poet. Paradisiac Montserrat hosts the serpent of Soufrière. But there is a hope conveyed in tender sentiment and freshness as of spring; and the playful pun on “waterfall” is magical.

“Great Alps leaps from my eyes/But where my water falls/Green blades appear/My tiny Emerald Isle”. The volcano is a source of death and life.

Tributes, (Section C) celebrate places and people. In small communities with scant records and at best selective memories, one must record icons in living lines. It could be the man/hero who makes the traffic lights to work, facilitating flow, mirroring the flow of life:

We say his name  
recall his legacy:  
Lights that “speak” to one another  
for easy traffic flow;

or it could be an archetypal figure like Thomas Hogan (p.21 ) reminiscent of Wordsworth’s Michael who read the rhythms of the winds and all the shades of heaven. “He knew the exact shade of blush/the ripe pomegranate must wear”. (The delicate painting is touching).

Section D not only contains the signature poem, “Trees Have Hands” but also “Wheels of Life” with carts that speak of social standing and life’s “relentless journey”; and “Making a U-Turn” with its clever image of an open-ended invitation. But beware of the siren call of the poet: the U-turn may lead to Christ.

“Break Time” is a powerful climactic section with a number of sensitively crafted pieces. A ‘break’ is creative but it is the strong imagery of the chatterbox hens that arrests attention, and the analogy with the women and their belly laugh is delicious. The moral must not be missed. Breaks and pauses are just critical for survival. It is difficult to resist a comment on “Sea Water”. The sea is not just a divider of islands but a linking mechanism. This is a useful lesson for islands that have long flirted with unity, but it goes deeper, bearing secrets, bearing life, buoyant and deep with the rhythm conveying something of the mysteries of the deep.

Elcia Daniel’s first book was worth the wait. It is worth the reading. She confronts life in its many moods and manifestations and subjects them to her creative will. She imaginatively captures the moods of scenes and people of all ages, including the mayhem of a mountain on fire. She does this with an appreciation of the depth and a consciousness of the complexities of the environment, and its impact on human existence here and maybe even hereafter. Daniel is an artist mindful of the multifaceted nature of her craft. She has much to say and the creative skill with which to sing it. *Trees Have Hands* unveils a mature artist of the word.

Howard A. Fergus KBE PhD

UWI Professor (retired)

## **B. Volcano**

## Revelation

To witness  
the birth pains of a mountain  
which labored long in silence,  
to feel the fragmenting  
of her ancient walls  
as her spawn leap out  
with perverted glee  
romping and spewing all over her sides  
is to know fear.

To feel  
the fury of that triumphant belch:  
“You must destroy to create!”  
Her missiles speak her dire intent.  
To be reshaped with the land  
thrown up like jigsaw pieces,  
to recreate a wholeness  
from a chastened and disrupted life  
is to know God.

## Crisis

Crisis is a mountain  
tearing at your soul  
wrenching your feet from the backyard  
where you've grown for years and years.  
It is ash in your hair  
your eyes, under your teeth  
filling your lungs  
smothering you.  
It is a black cloud  
racing towards you  
carrying heaven knows what.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elcia Daniel was born on the island of Anguilla where she started her teaching career. She attended Teachers' Training College in Antigua, and later moved to Montserrat to settle with her husband. She has taught throughout the school system, and was Head of the Language Department at the Montserrat Secondary School. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Education from the University of the Virgin Islands, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in History from the University of the West Indies. Her present place of abode is St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands where she taught English at the Charlotte Amalie High School before retiring in 2007. She has had several poems and short stories published in Caribbean Journals over the years.

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