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Dear Review Committee,

I am the Executive Director of a micro press called Oleb Books, a publishing house focused on promoting disability and illness stories. In 2021, we received a grant from the McKnight Foundation to publish the work of a disabled poet through a poetry contest. Suzanne Nielsen was the winner of that prize and that is how the relationship between Oleb Books and Nielsen began.

I must share that while I had met Nielsen through our work at Metro State and Springboard for the Arts, her work was reviewed anonymously by the group of judges of the Oleb Books Prize in Poetry committee. Thus, her identity was unknown until her group of poems was deemed the winning collection.

Oleb Books published “Face Up” in 2022 and the audience feedback was outstanding. The title received glowing reviews from the Midwest Review of Books, Rain Taxi, and Disability in Progress. Moreover, the CBS affiliate in the Twin Cities, WCCO, was so impressed by the collection that Nielsen was offered a segment in the morning show to kick-off poetry month in April 2023.

In 2023, Oleb Books received a grant from the Jerome Foundation to put together an anthology on the topic of being a parent with a disability. Once again, Nielsen’s work was selected for publication through an anonymous review process. “Accessing Parenthood” was published in 2024 and received positive reviews from Diversity Rules Magazine, Philadelphia News and received a segment on the popular show, *A Novel Idea* – which is distributed through the NPR affiliate in San Francisco.

With both projects Nielsen has published through Oleb Books, she was selected by a group of her peers. This means that all judges identified as writers with a disability or chronic illness. For both review cycles the judges selected Nielsen because her voice is relatable – she does not hold back her emotions – and timely as the trials she presents are relevant to the concerns of people with disabilities in the modern era.

Oleb Books participates in the Mosaic program, which is a platform that allows teachers to add sections of our titles to their online courses. Nielsen’s poems, *Freeze Frame* and *Such Colorful Stories* have been chosen as part of poetry lessons by 43 teachers in the United States and have been studied by 844 high school students.

As a blind writer and disability and narrative medicine scholar, I believe that Nielsen has made an important contribution to the fields of disability and illness studies by compiling an impressive body of work that empowers the disability community.

Sincerely,

Belo Miguel Cipriani, Ed.D.

Executive Director

Oleb Books